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FOUR DISCOURSES.

- I. On the Duty of a Christian Minister under the Obligation of conforming to a National Religion established by the Civil Powers.
- II. On the Questions, What is Christianity? and, Where is it to be learned?
- III. On the true Meaning of the Phrase, THE INTERESTS OF RELIGION.
- IV. On the Original Principles of the FIRST PROTESTANTS.

Delivered to the
Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Cleveland,
In the Years 1767, 1769, 1771, and 1773.

BY
FRANCIS BLACKBURNE, M.A.
Archdeacon of Cleveland.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE:

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MDCCLXXV.

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Clergy of the Archdiocese of Cleveland
In the Years 1765, 1771, 1772, and 1773.



FRANCIS BLAKE, M.A.
Archdeacon of Cleveland.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
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MDCCLXXV.

P R E F A C E.

THE variety of publications that have appeared for and against a reformation of our ecclesiastical forms of doctrine and worship, may seem to afford any man, who hath employed his studies on such subjects, a sufficient apology for throwing into the collection a few of his own sentiments, upon the presumption of his having an equal right to be heard with others, whom either the general importance of the disquisition, or some critical occasion, hath engaged to take a share in the debate.

It may be alledged, perhaps, that in the way the following discourses were first delivered, nothing should be said that is not in perfect agreement with the established ordinances of the church, which have not only the sanction of public authority, but, as it is generally supposed, the full approbation of our common superiors with respect to their propriety and fitness to promote the true ends of the christian religion.

But as suggestions of this kind seem to imply, that, where public authority interposes,
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the clergy should have no judgment of their own, even in matters which so nearly concern them, and may be thought to exhibit too much of the *το θαυμαζειν πρασαντων δυνατων*,* for the digestion of a good christian in any station, they may well be postponed to considerations of another kind.

As protestants, we have adopted another standard of judgment, and it is but *candid* to leave the question open for a fair discussion, and to allow the scriptures to have their weight as far as their authority will go; and I am sure it is but *decent* to suppose, that the approbation of our superiors will not be found in that scale where the scriptures are not.

If the objection is only levelled at the impropriety of appearing to espouse a party where the hearers are as capable judges of the subject as the speaker himself, I hope I may be allowed to take shelter under the example of some of my more considerable brethren in the same office, who have delivered themselves with all freedom upon the question, when and where they could by no means be certain of the unanimity of their several audiences.†

It
of the christian religion.

* Compare *Levit. xix. 15. lxx.* with *Jude 16.*

† See the Charges of the Doctors *Rutherford, Balguy, Tottie, &c.*

It is true, some of *their* dissertations are said to have been published at the request of the reverend bodies to which they were respectively addressed. To distinctions of that sort the following discourses have no pretensions, and now appear, not as peculiarly calculated for the notice of the clergy, but in the way of appeal to the judgment of the public in general, which is not often biased in these days, by the quality of the sponsors, who, by soliciting the publication of such performances, may be understood to pledge their credit for the excellence of them.

I freely own I have always considered the laity, and have often wished the laity would consider themselves as greatly interested in the conduct and ministrations of the clergy; and that *both* would pay a mutual attention to each other in what concerns the common edification of the christian brotherhood. With these sentiments, I hold myself obliged to give some account to *both*, of the motives which have led me sometimes to deviate in the following discourses from the track in which many names of renown have travelled, not without great applause, and a numerous *suite* of disciples.

The *first* of these discourses took its rise from a suspicion, that the younger, and the

less capable part of the clergy, studious and attentive to discharge their duty according to *the due order of the church*, might sometimes overlook what the holy scripture requires of us towards *making full proof of our ministry*.

A serious reader of the scriptures, having this case in his view, will readily discover, that a mere compliance with our rubrical and canonical directions, tho' ever so punctual and exact, will not answer all the ends of our peculiar calling, of *warning the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, supporting the weak*, and in exercising that *patience and diligent circumspection* prescribed to those who watch for the souls of their respective flocks, and expect to be called to give account of their fidelity in that important province.

The church of England, in particular cases, leaves a great deal to the *ghostly counsel and advice of the minister*, over and besides the provision made in her public forms for the consolation and relief of her conscientious members; and for this purpose, proposes the *ministry of God's word* as the supplementary aid to the *discrete and learned minister*,* who, in the variety of exigencies that may fall in his way, will find occasion to apply it in
many

* See the first Exhortation in the Communion Office, and the Rubrics in that for the Visitation of the Sick.

many instances where he will have no direction, but from the circumstances of the case proposed to him, and his own good sense, in adapting his *counsel* to those circumstances. And indeed, if barely using the forms of our established liturgy, or applying the doctrines of the church exhibited in the articles, homilies, &c. were sufficient for all purposes of this sort, a great number of learned and able divines of our church have strangely misemployed their time and their talents, in stating cases of conscience, and giving solutions of them, from their own sense of scripture; and this, as some of them have said, with a view to accommodate such of the clergy, as, on account of their other employments, have not time to make themselves masters of the science of casuistry, by a systematical study.*

But without any particular respect to those more intricate questions, for the solution of which the adepts in casuistical learning are obliged to have recourse to a variety of laws besides the christian scriptures, † there are

* See the Preface to Bishop Taylor's *Ductor Dubitantium*, at the beginning.

† According to the Emblem at the beginning of Bishop Taylor's book, an adroit Casuist should be well acquainted with the *Law of Nature*, the *Law of Right Reason*, the *Mosaic Law*, the *Law of the Gospel*, the *Law of the Holy Spirit*, the *Law of Man*, and the *Law of Custom*.

many cases where the scriptures *alone* are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, and may be *profitably* applied in the daily intercourse a serious minister hath with his parishioners, where no extraordinary talents are required on either side, to bring the instruction home to the understanding and conscience of the party concerned to receive it.

If any clergyman should be so far prepossessed in favour of the forms provided by public authority, as to think them sufficient for all cases of this kind, he would perhaps alter his mind, upon having a little more experience in a different situation. There are numbers, undoubtedly, who may content themselves with the edification they receive from our public ministrations. But our common forms, besides being rendered languid and uninteresting by frequent repetition, are too general to take in the occasions and necessities of many individuals, who have a more affecting sense of religion upon their minds than is felt by others who discover less concern, or less lively impressions of the necessity of caring for their salvation upon the terms of the gospel.

To obviate misapprehensions of this kind, whether proceeding from indolence, secular dissipation, or prejudices of education, it seemed

seemed expedient to represent in a short historical account, from what circumstances human establishments of religion took their rise, to what corruptions they have been liable, and how those corruptions have defeated the laudable ends for which they were understood to be originally instituted; and then, by way of contrast with this representation, to state the nature and tendency of that religious reformation intended by our blessed Saviour in the dispensation he came upon earth to reveal and to propagate. And lastly, to shew, from the moderation used in the present administration of our ecclesiastical discipline, the room and encouragement we have to exert ourselves in promoting the religious improvement of our people, many degrees beyond the performance of our legally prescribed duty, though discharged with the utmost punctuality.

In pursuing this subject, it was hardly possible to overlook a case of great importance to the honour and credit of our religion, and the private satisfaction of a greater number of our worthy and conscientious brethren, than perhaps may be apprehended from mere appearances.

Every one is not equally bigotted to human establishments of religion, nor is every clergyman so careless and unconcerned about the

consistency of one part of his duty with another, as not to reflect, how far the obligations he is under as a minister of the established church, may be warranted by any authority supposed to be given in the scriptures to impose them. A disposition to examine into this matter, may create doubts and difficulties concerning the rectitude of complying with what a serious man may suspect to be contrary to the terms of his commission, as it is exhibited in the christian scriptures.

On another hand, a clergyman of the established church can hardly officiate in any branch of his public duty, without meeting with some reference or appeal to the scriptures, as the foundation upon which our ecclesiastical forms are built. And it can hardly be, but that some will concern themselves to examine whether this foundation is well laid, and the superstructure carried up in conformity to the rule that the compilers of our public offices declare they adopted and adhered to, in framing the several parts of our present church establishment.

Clergymen, indeed, may be very differently qualified for inquiries of this sort. Some, and they perhaps a majority, may not, for reasons hereafter to be given, be sufficiently capable of carrying on such examinations to any decision satisfactory to themselves. Others may have

have better means and capacities for these investigations; and if to a serious and diligent inquirer, the forms by which he is required to officiate in the church appear, in particular instances, to be in disagreement with the written word, he may well question with himself, whether his usefulness in other respects will excuse his compliance with forms which he apprehends to be unscriptural.

I have but just touched upon this case in the first of these discourses, and as it is a case of great delicacy, I am very unwilling to enlarge upon it. But having, since that discourse was first delivered, been particularly affected by the *secession* of a most worthy and valuable friend,* for whose sentiments I may be allowed to have some degree of partiality, it may perhaps be expected I should give this matter a little farther consideration.

Every one must allow, that, in cases of this nature, the party concerned must be finally determined by his own understanding and conscience. No man can pretend to give a righteous sentence, but he who has the whole evidence, of which the matter in question is capable, before him; and the testimony of conscience cannot be made use of, but

* The Rev. Mr Theophilus Lindsey, late Vicar of Catterick in Yorkshire.

but by the man who feels the impresson it makes upon himself.

Upon these grounds, the reasons alledged by this worthy person for quitting his station in the established church are *unanswerable*, and his conduct *irreproachable*. And the invidious reflections that have been cast upon him for taking this step, will derive no great reputation upon his censurers, either for their good sense, their christian charity, or their good manners. No man can know how far this valuable man is, or judge how far he ought to be affected by the reasons offered in his Apology, so well as himself; and for any other man to say, those reasons are not sufficient to justify a separation from the established church, is only saying, either that the objector has no such reasons, or that, if he had them, he should not think them sufficient to justify *his own* separation.

I should not indeed blame any man, who, from the same or any other motives wherein his conscience is concerned, should separate himself from the church, without making any apology at all for his conduct. I must freely confess, I should not, in the like circumstances, be at all disposed to refer my case to the judgment of the public, unless I could allow the public a right to over-rule my own sentiments, and to determine for me
how

how I should act, either with or against my own convictions. A protestant, who grounds his principles on what appears to him the genuine sense of scripture, and is conscious that in using his christian liberty, he infringes no civil ordinance respecting the peace and welfare of the community, is under no obligation to account to the public for deserting the established system, when that system appears to him to desert the standard of religious faith and duty it professes to follow. It is a matter entirely betwixt God and the man's own conscience, in which it is not to be expected the public should be either equitable or competent judges. To apologize indeed in such a case, is a commendable instance of candour and sincerity, but is by no means what the public has a *right* to expect.

"Yes," say some people, "surely such an apology is indispensably necessary, especially from a clergyman, on account of the scandal and offence his separation may give to the serious and well-disposed members of the established church, upon which his secession will be understood to imply a charge of something criminal in their conformity."

But perhaps it may be a more difficult matter to conjure down this *dæmon* of scandal than these well-disposed members of the church may imagine. A dissenter would tell them,

them, that he is equally scandalized when one of his teachers conforms to the established church, and has equal reason to expect an apology from *him*. And I confess, I have not that veneration for the dignity of an establishment, as to think there is more reason for the one expectation than the other.

But let us confine our speculations to the case before us. Let us suppose the worthy man who has so sensibly and affectingly apologized for his secession, had continued in the church after his objections to her forms of doctrine and worship had been known, or upon some probable presumptions violently suspected, would the tongue of scandal and offence have been silent, or less querulous, upon this discovery?

Let us appeal to some late transactions in a remarkable case, for an answer to this question.

It is no long time since a masterly performance appeared, under the title of *Considerations on the Propriety of requiring Subscriptions to Articles of Faith*; in which the subject is treated with uncommon temper, and a strength of reasoning that will hardly be broken by the efforts of such advocates as have lately been employed on the other side of the question.

It is not to be expected, that writings of this tendency should be left to make their natural impression upon the public without opposition. Accordingly, an *answer* was soon dispatched from the Clarendon Press; for the merits of which, the reader may be referred to a little piece, intituled, *A Defence of the Considerations, &c.* printed for Wilkie, 1774.

But so it happened, that besides the arguments offered in these *Considerations*, importing the impropriety of requiring the usual subscriptions, the author thought proper to offer a plea for such of the clergy "as may continue to minister in, or communicate with the church, though they may think something or other may be made better, and more adapted to the ends of religion and the interests of christianity."

At this opening, which he thought afforded him an opportunity of a *personal* attack that was not to be flighted, the *answerer* enters with all alacrity, but, as it often happens to such adventurers, with a zeal too impetuous to allow him time to chuse the ground on which he might engage to the best advantage.

He observes, that "a clergyman's accepting of benefices, dignities, and a bishoprick, and

“ and on every new promotion repeating his
 “ subscriptions and declarations, joining in
 “ the prayers of the church, and saying in
 “ the face of the congregation, that he be-
 “ lieves what he does not; and then pleads
 “ for his conduct, and his remaining in the
 “ church, and rising from one post to ano-
 “ ther, that it is that he may do more good,
 “ and perform a more acceptable service to
 “ his master, is plainly in scripture language,
 “ *Let us do evil, that good may come.*” *

In the like strain of *piety and christian bene-
 volence*, another steeled champion falls upon
 the *Considerer*, in no very wise apostrophe to
 a mitre, which perhaps would fit any head
 that is intituled to wear one; but which,
 that this adventurer might not appear to fight
 as one that *beateth the air*, is clapped upon
 the head of the author of the *Considerations*,
 inscribed with the above-mentioned motto,
Let us do evil, that good may come. †

When

* See the *London Magazine* for June 1774, p. 293.

† See *A scriptural Consultation of the Arguments a-
 gainst the one Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*,
 produced by the Rev. Mr. Lindley in his *late Apology*,
 p. 227. As wise or as witty as these Gentlemen may
 think themselves in applying scripture language to the
 condemnation of those they do not like, they must bear
 to be told, that they *mistake* the meaning of the text
 they

When such inquisitors of heretical pravity are abroad, it must needs be that offences come from the most innocent, and even the most laudable actions. It should however be remembered, that the *Woe* to him by whom the offence

they have thus quoted and applied; for I must not suppose they would wilfully pervert it, merely for the pious pleasure of defaming an adversary. That indeed would be to abuse the apostle Paul, as well as the author of the *Considerations*. The words are so far from being scripture language, as good christians understand that phrase, that they are the language of Paul's calumniators which he disowns, and are equivalent to a mistaken inference that others with a better meaning perhaps might draw from his premisses, viz. *Let us continue to sin, that grace may abound, or that greater good may come*: i. e. that the glory of God may become more conspicuous or illustrious, the farther his pardoning grace is extended to the sins of mankind; [see *Grotius* upon *Rom.* vi. 8. and *Le Clere* on *Rom.* iii. 8.] which is a very different kind of good, from the edification proposed to be communicated to certain persons, by conforming to the erroneous system they espouse, by way of having a freer access to them. A case more like that of St Paul, who to the Jews became a Jew that he might gain the Jews, &c. *Rom.* ix. 20, 21, 22. But if these gentlemen have not the charity to make allowances of this sort, they should have the justice to be certain that the author of the *Considerations* adopts the premisses they have laid down for him, before they draw their conclusion, lest they should incur the condemnation of St Paul's slanderous reporters, and so,

Evil on itself should back recoil.

offence cometh, may belong to the man who takes it, as well as to him who gives it, especially when it is taken from calumny and misrepresentation.

For against whom are these zealous writers pouring out this torrent of satyr and indignation? If the figure they are exhibiting to the public is not a mere pageant of their own dressing up, why do they not give it a name, that we may know and beware of it? If they are right in their conjectures concerning the author of the *Considerations*, are they certain, that their charge against him of *duplicity* and *prevarication* is not a mere slander?

It is plain the *Answerer* does not know the explicit opinion of that author concerning the Trinity, for he *wishes* to know it.* The *scriptural confuter*, seems to take it for granted, that the said author is an heretic of the same stamp with the *Apologist* against whom he hath prepared his voluminous antidote; and yet if common fame is not mistaken in the person to whom these *Considerations* are ascribed, I could shew this zealous orthodox champion, some passages in that eminent writer's acknowledged works, for which he was reprov'd with no little bitterness, by a noted Antitrinitarian, and reckoned among the most bigotted

* See *Defence of the Considerations*, p. 37.

bigotted Churchists, who, in the reprovers opinion, deserved no quarter.

The good of it is, that no man can have much to fear from the wrath of a writer whose intemperate zeal and arrogance prompts him profanely to boast, that "if his own argument [in behalf of the Trinity] is not decisive, the spirit of truth must be a liar, and the simple and guileless zeal of the apostles, crafty and designing duplicity."*

The orthodoxy of the *Answerer* of the *Considerations* is not quite so extravagant. He acknowledges, "there are some things in the articles and liturgy of the church of England, which he would be glad to see amended, though, he believes, not the same as the petitioning clergy would object to."†

This *Answerer* is commonly reported to be one who hath already passed through the hands of some of these petitioners, not much to his comfort or his reputation.‡ If so, he ought

* *Scriptural Confutation*, p. 229.

† *London Magazine*, u. s.

‡ See *Letters to a Member of Parliament*, in which the present design of removing subscription to human articles of faith is vindicated, in opposition to Archdeacon Randolph's Charge, &c. Printed for Wilkie and Merrill, 1772.

ought to know by this time, that the petitioning clergy, as petitioners, meddle not with any particular articles of the church of England, but object to *any* subscription to articles of faith, except such as are recognised by a subscription to the scriptures only.

The *Answerer* however, has *his* objections, as well as the petitioning clergy, to *some things* in the articles and liturgy, and would be glad to have them amended. He must, then, of course be sorry in some degree, that they are not amended; and perhaps not the less sorry, on account of his obligation to subscribe them as agreeable to the word of God. What may these *some things* be? The public has at least as much right to know them, as the answerer hath to know the opinion of the author of the *Considerations* concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. How else shall we be certain, that this rigid censor himself is not *doing evil that good may come*. He hath said, "that if people will keep their opinions to themselves, no man will hurt them."* If this is his refuge, his distress is to be pitied, but he should be advised by his friends to change his plan when he next undertakes the defence of subscriptions.

It

* See *The Defence of the Considerations*, p. 25.

It seems to be the misfortune of these gentlemen that they want to be taken for Popes, at the same time that they expose their fallibility by the most manifest indications. But to do them justice, it is a misfortune not peculiar to them and their fraternity, but too often incident to others whose creed consists of very different articles. There are too many in different religious societies, who will not allow, that any man should have any doubts or difficulties concerning certain points of doctrine, because they themselves have none; as if there was that precision in their theological speculations, which should conclude all men, whatever their capacities are, or whatever their course of study or education may have been.

If these enlightened writers on the one side and the other, will needs have it, that all the world are prejudiced except themselves, and those who think as they do, let them consider at least, that prejudices are not to be eradicated all at once, and that what they may think fit to call prejudices, afford as strong convictions to very honest minds, as what they take to be rational deductions do to themselves.

The different ideas which even scripture language gives to very learned and eminent

men, with respect to points of theology controverted both in former and later times, may afford a very reasonable apology for persons of inferior talents who range themselves on different sides of the dispute, and also for others who *hesitate*, without any just imputation upon their understandings or their sincerity.

A recent instance may perhaps illustrate this matter to better effect, than an example taken from a remoter age.

A learned and very able writer hath informed us, in a publication of this present year, that *Grotius*, *Stillingfleet*, and other learned men, "have defended two propositions, as the fundamental doctrines of christianity, both which are *contrary to the Old Testament*, and *absolutely false*."* He brings in Dr *Clarke* for a share of the censure, observing however, "that the Doctor hath varied the phrase, and softened the doctrine, to make it less liable to exception."

The matter is of no small importance, and there are some things in our established forms concerning this subject, (the *satisfaction* made

* The apology of *Benjamin Mordecai* for embracing the christian religion, Letter v. p. 26.

to God by the death of Christ) which cannot be vindicated, if the propositions above-mentioned are *not* true. The reasoning of this masterly writer upon these propositions, deserves the most serious attention. On the other hand, the arguments of *Grotius, Stillingfleet, Clarke, &c.* are by no means void of strength, and the appearance at least of solidity.

What shall an honest conscientious conformist, who is dubious which of these disputants is in the right, do in such a case? It should seem to be no light matter to adhere to a church, and more especially in the character of an officiating minister, which adopts propositions as *fundamental doctrines of christianity*, that are *absolutely false*; nor, on the other hand, is it a trifle to go over to a church, which denies a proposition as *absolutely false*, that, for ought the doubter knows, may be *a fundamental doctrine of christianity*.

It is an easy matter for these adepts who are prepared to determine *de omni scibili*, to say to the doubter, "examine the scriptures for your self, and form your creed according to the light you may receive from thence." Alas he hath been sent thither before by both parties, and hath not met with the satisfaction he seeks; not for want of diligence in the search, or a desire to be in-

formed of the truth, but for want of that capacity to discern and judge, which enables men *more happily gifted*, to form their opinions upon *the slightest inspection* of the proofs adduced on either side. A very honest and a very sensible man may be under the like dilemma, with respect to other doctrines espoused by the church established. Nor, as far as I know, would the matter be mended, should the doubter go over to the dissenters of any denomination, who have all of them their theological nostrums respectively, the authority of which will appear to a candid examiner to depend, for the most part, upon something far short of demonstration.

The misfortune is, that most of these disputable questions are about such things as are quite out of the reach of our knowledge, and ought not, for that reason, to have been formed into articles of faith, merely because they who laid down and established the terms of communion in particular churches, pretended to comprehend them.*

Had

* Mr Le Clerc, speaking of those fathers who disputed whether the angels have bodies, says, that they who held the affirmative side of the question, "have
"alleged no evident reason to prove it, and all that
"can be concluded from the controversy is, that each
"affirmed or denied a thing concerning which they
had

Had the first founders of these particular churches foreseen, how much their decisions would have perplexed men more diffident than themselves, or, if you please, of capacities less comprehensive than their own, they must have been very wicked to have laid such snares in the way of posterity. I speak of christian and protestant founders. But we are taught to believe, and indeed upon probable evidence, that the first framers of our established forms, were pious and humble men, who had the best meanings, as well as the strongest convictions, that the system of theology they composed for public use, was in every respect in perfect conformity with the word of God. We now perceive however that they presumed too far on their own abilities and discernment, and the least we ought

had no knowledge." Upon which he observes, " We
 " should suspend our judgment, and affirm nothing
 " concerning any subject which is equally unknown to
 " us. But such a suspension suits not with the *Dog-*
 " *matics*, who can hardly confess that they know not
 " all things; and believe it is the part of an ingenious
 " man to determine himself speedily upon all sorts of
 " questions. Indeed, without this, it is not possible to
 " frame a system as complete as it ought to be, to be
 " accounted a learned man; and it would be a shame-
 " ful thing to confess, that a thousand questions might
 " be asked upon every article, which could not be an-
 " swered, if one should say nothing but what one
 " knows." *Life of Clemens Alexandrinus*, p. 56, 57.

to do, is so far to retrench their plan, as to release ourselves and our conscientious brethren, from the necessity of declaring assent and consent to points of doctrine, concerning which our reformers could know nothing, any more than we, or nothing more than they could gather from the general doctrines, the Spirit of God hath thought fit to communicate in the scriptures, the common directory of *our* faith, as well as *theirs*.

But as their system continues to be bound upon us by the laws of a civil establishment, and is not likely to be reduced, in the present age, to a more liberal standard of conformity, and is yet adhered to by so large a majority of our fellow-christians, and has in it so many excellent things which may be turned to the use of edification, without any especial respect to the abstruse and scholastic doctrines, that are held up as the shibboleth of the church, (which after all allows us to bring them to the test of the scriptures) it may be worth the consideration of a serious minister of the gospel, how far he may be justified, *upon the whole*, in leaving his station, where he hath so many fair occasions of being profitable to the people under his care, and exchanging it for another, where the very circumstance of his having a new foundation to lay, must make his success in the practical

practical and far more important part of his duty, extremely precarious.

It is, I freely own, a mean and disingenuous part in any clergyman of the establishment to gloss over the faults and blemishes of it, and to defend all the forms in use, merely for the purpose of exculpating himself for continuing to officiate in the church; but I will not scruple to say, that no man has a right to charge another with hypocrisy and duplicity, who fairly and openly declares his sentiments on these defects, and not only wishes, but uses his best endeavours to have them reformed.

A sensible man who has objections to the forms and ordinances received in the religious society with which he is in communion, may have reasons of conscience inducing him seriously to deliberate whether he is obliged to separate from it on account of *those* objections? There have been, both in former and latter times, many wise and good men who have thought it a matter of no little consequence to separate from a society professing itself a christian church, and adopting the scriptures as the only authentic rule of the faith and duty of its members, even though it should have adopted some very exceptionable principles and practices into its established constitution.

tion.* The sense that one man has of the church's deviations from her acknowledged rule, would not probably justify him in separating from communion with her; at the same

* If I should mention *Erasmus* and *Father Paul* as instances, I doubt not but I should be told, that we in these days, have better lights concerning christian obligations, than were afforded to those times in which these eminent men flourished. It may be so, and it may be otherwise, according as different men cultivate the means of information afforded them respectively. But in either case it is not nothing that the learned *Jortin* hath offered by way of apology for *Erasmus* (*Life*, vol. i. p. 274—276.) where perhaps he was not totally forgetful of his own situation. *Father Paul's* convictions, if we may believe *Bishop Burnet* (*Life of Bishop Bedell*, p. 15, 16.) were more pungent. "He wished
 " he could have left *Venice* and come over to *England*
 " with *Mr Bedell*;" in order, we must suppose, to exchange the popish for the protestant religion; but having found this impracticable, "he made a shift to
 " comply, as far as he could, with the established way
 " of their worship; but he had, in many things, particular methods, by which, he in a great measure,
 " rather quieted than satisfied his conscience. In saying
 " of mass, he passed over many parts of the canon, and
 " in particular, those prayers in which that sacrifice
 " was offered up to the honour of saints. He never
 " prayed to saints, nor joyned in those parts of the
 " offices that went against his conscience. And in private confessions and discourses, he took the people
 " off from those abuses, and gave them right notions
 " of the purity of the christian religion; so he hoped,
 " he was sowing seeds that might be fruitful in another
 " ther

same time that another man, who considers her deviations in another view, may think his separation from her, not only justifiable, but necessary. Both may agree that she does in fact

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 "ther age; and thus he believed he might live innocent in a church that he thought so defiled." I must own I do not understand the difference between *quieting* and *satisfying* the conscience; nor can I find out what might be Bishop Burnet's idea of such difference, unless it may be explained by this good bishop's continuing in the church of England, notwithstanding the representation he has given of it in the valuable *conclusion* of the History of his own Times. Upon that supposition, might I not fairly offer this worthy prelate, as well as the excellent *Jortin*, as examples of wise and good men reconciling themselves to conformity, in a church which, though very far from faultless in their account, was still less obnoxious than the church to which *Erasmus* and Father Paul adhered? But to proceed a little farther with Father Paul. Bishop Bedell, in a sermon by him preached from *Revelations* xviii. 4. *Come out of her my people, &c.* undertakes, among other things, to apologize for some who continued in communion with the church of Rome, in which Bishop Burnet did not doubt but he had his friend Padre Paul in his thoughts." (*Life of Bedell*, p. 156.) The whole citation is well worth the perusal, if it is but as a matter of curiosity. But I shall only select one passage, which if it will apply in the case of Father Paul, the benefit of it may *a fortiori* be claimed by the conformists to a less exceptionable church. "Neither," says the preacher, "let that hard term of *Hypocrisy* be used of the infirmity, and sometime of humble and peaceable carriage of some that oppose not common errors,

fact deviate from her rule; but a question still remains between them, what those deviations are, and how far they make conformity to her ordinances sinful and criminal?

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“ errors, nor wrestle with the greater part of men, but
 “ do follow the multitude, reserving a right knowledge
 “ to themselves; and sometimes (by the favour which
 “ God gives them to find where they live) obtain bet-
 “ ter conditions than others can.” *Life of Bedell*,
 p. 162. The latter part of this passage seems evidently
 to point out the case and circumstances of Father *Paul*,
 and is not perhaps much different from that of some
 worthy persons among ourselves. Bishop *Burnet* says,
 “ when one prest Father *Paul* hard in this matter, and
 “ objected, that he still held communion with an ido-
 “ latrous church, and gave it credit by adhering out-
 “ wardly to it, by which others that depended much
 “ on his example, would be likewise encouraged to
 “ continue in it; all the answer he made to this was,
 “ That God had not given him the spirit of *Luther*.”
 Father *Paul* however had something else to say for
 himself. “ The fabrick of God’s church,” says he,
 “ though it be built by so great an architect, yet al-
 “ ways has had, and will have its imperfections, thro’
 “ the defect and fault of the materials; provided the
 “ foundation be good, we must bear with other faults,
 “ and look upon them as human weaknesses.—A man
 “ that would needs have every thing done to perfection,
 “ ought to remember the saying of the gospel, *How*
 “ *then shall the scriptures be fulfilled.*” *Letters*, xxx. In
 those days, many schemes of agreement between the
 popish and reformed churches were exhibited by differ-
 ent authors. It appears by the xxixth of these letters
 published

I do not apprehend, that the most zealous defenders of the established church are so perfectly agreed in the sense of particular scriptures, as to pronounce with united voice, how

published by *Brown*, that Father *Paul* had some correspondence with the younger *Hotoman* upon this subject, concerning which, having observed, that the time was not favourable to a project of that kind, he adds, "I do believe that many of the differences amongst us, are merely verbal, and they make me sometimes laugh at them. Others of them there are that might be indured without breaking any peace for them. And others there are that might be easily composed. But the main of all is, that both parties are agreed in this, that they will not have them composed, but think the disagreement irreconcilable.—Two contenders will never agree, so long as there is in either of them any hopes of getting the better; but where there is a certainty in both, that they are in the right, there is no talking of agreement. Both sides at this time hold it for certain that they shall get the better, the one by divine means, the other by human." Every man may apply these authorities as he thinks good. I do not think they will all do for the case of every scrupulous conformist, particularly not that which is taken from the imperfection of all human institutions, and is most absurdly urged by some, who would be thought to have no scruples, against any attempts at reformation at all. I do not know whence Bishop *Burnet* had his account of the liberty Father *Paul* took with the offices of his church, or whether Bishop *Bedell* alludes to it where he says in the citation above, that "some by the favour they found where they

how far any religious society of protestants among us, deviates from this capital rule in every instance. We must therefore necessarily differ, both with respect to the instances wherein

"they lived, obtained better conditions than others;" but this is certain, that *Bedell* himself was not disposed to allow any such conditions. "For when a curate of another parish, being employed to read prayers in his cathedral, added somewhat to the collects, the bishop observing he did this once or twice, went from his place to the reader's pew, and took the book out of his hand, and in the hearing of the congregation, suspended him for his presumption, and read the rest of the office himself." *Life*, p. 145. Might not one say with truth, that Bishop *Bedell* was, in this instance, less enlightened than *Father Paul*? On the other hand, the account given by *Father Fulgentio*, that "when, upon an intimation that Pope *Gregory* XV. looked upon him to be an obstruction to the peace between the republic of *Venice* and the see of Rome, *Father Paul* determined to retire out of the state of *Venice*, he declined fixing his residence in a protestant country, that he might not expose himself to calumnies;" which *Mr Lockman* interprets to mean, lest he should be thought a convert to the protestant religion; and thereupon says, "How different is Bishop *Burnet's* account (quoted above) from that of *Father Fulgentio*!" *Life* of *Fa. Paul*. xcvii. Probable arguments however might be brought to reconcile *Fulgentio* and *Burnet*. *Fulgentio* has taken no notice of any friendship or acquaintance between *Bedell* and *Father Paul*. Can we conclude from hence, that there was none? The calumnies the father was afraid of, might be of the political as well as of the religious kind.* Between the

wherein even our own church is supposed to deviate, and with respect to the degree of blame, or if you will, of guilt, imputable to the church for persisting in such deviation.

If any one should affirm that we have men among us who would swear, subscribe to, and read any thing that should be prescribed to them, with the single view to the profits that may be annexed to the offices for which such compliances are the legal qualification; instead of contradicting him, I will only gently remind him, that there may be such men in *civil* as well as in *ecclesiastical* departments, and possibly in some *ecclesiastical* departments not

time when Father Paul is said by Burnet, to think of retiring to England with Bedell, viz. 1607, to the accession of Gregory XV. 1621, is an interval of fourteen years, in which length of time, the sentiments and circumstances of particular persons usually undergo great alterations. Fulgentio however takes notice, that the father came into some trouble for not repeating the *salve regina* at the end of the mass. I wish to have it understood, that these instances are not brought to furnish any sort of men with apologies or expedients of exculpation, to which they may possibly have no title; but to restrain, if possible, that spirit of judging one another, where the verdict neither is nor can be supported by sufficient evidence. And above all, to suggest, with all due deference to our superiors, that the same sort of *exactions* which gave offence and disquiet to wise and good men in communion with the church of Rome, can never do honour to a protestant church.

not understood to be established by law. But if any man should be so rash, or so void of candor, as to pass an indiscriminate censure upon the conforming clergy, as if lucrative prospects were in general the motives of their entering upon, or continuing in their respective stations, he must be very imperfectly acquainted with the sentiments, the understandings, or the circumstances, of perhaps the most serious and useful part of them. Among these are numbers who have very different notions concerning human establishments of religion, and particularly concerning the forms and ordinances in our own. They who have their suspicions, or even a strong persuasion, that many things in them are wrong and ought to be reformed, may still have substantial reasons for not leaving their station in the church, and I will venture to name for *one*, the impossibility of their being in any degree so useful in any other.*

It

* The *usefulness* here meant, hath respect only to the pastoral intercourse of a minister with his parishioners. But there is another sort of *usefulness* perhaps of no less importance, which would be totally defeated, were the clergymen above described to resign their cures; and which I cannot better express than in the words of the masterly writer of the Letters to a Member of Parliament above quoted. "Though this avowal of the principle which leads me," says this worthy person, "is,

It seems to be a matter of indifference with these zealous and disinterested censors, who would have every clergyman to leave the church, unless he is perfectly convinced that the church wants no reformation, that many hundreds by such secession might want bread to eat, and raiment to put on. They would probably tell the sufferers, that they are not to look at the temporal consequences of their self-denial, but leave their future provision to providence. Such suggestions come with great ease from those who are not to be at the expence of maintaining these outcasts. But though *that* may be none of their concern, it certainly would become their *candor* and their *charity*, to point out the

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"is, I think, a sufficient answer to every peevish call
 "to resign, yet there is a variety of considerations
 "which should induce every friend of christian liberty,
 "at the present time, to preserve his influence in the
 "church. The adversary of reformation would be
 "glad to see such a proof of our sincerity as would de-
 "stroy our weight; but he is not entitled to so much
 "consideration. Indeed all the clergy may be confi-
 "dered as prisoners in a common dungeon. The only
 "difference between them is in the degree of sensibility
 "to the misfortune. But what should we think of an
 "unfeeling fellow under sentence of the law, who had
 "betrayed his companion by a want of spirit to resist,
 "and then insulted his misfortune, from a want of
 "sensibility." *Letter vii. p. 44.*

the provinces in which these honest separatists might be equally useful, though not so fat and well liking, as they are in the church of England.

It would look invidious to pursue this subject as far as it would lead us. Whether these rigid casuists are orthodox churchmen, or rational dissenters, the dilemma might be brought home to themselves, by appealing to facts, which the candor of some, and the want of information in others, may have kept in obscurity. Recrimination is not the way to sow those grains of allowance (pardon the quibble) that might bring forth the amiable fruits of mutual forbearance, which all of us want in our turn.

In the mean time, the fact is, that numbers of our brethren remain in the church (whatever their motives may be) who have very different conceptions, concerning her established doctrines, and the forms by which the law obliges them to officiate. Concerning these, or at least a majority of them, I am persuaded, they may do much more service in their respective stations, in a hundred instances, where neither the church nor the state would interfere with them, than they can do harm by their conformity, or than they can do good by separating from the church. And to these, I would willingly hope

hope a few intimations to that purpose may be neither useless nor impertinent; leaving the rest to every man's conscience, and confiding that our superiors will in no long time be convinced, that so much of our church system as is worth supporting, will never be hurt by being established upon more equitable conditions.

The second of these discourses refers to an objection made to the christian religion, on account of the *uncertainty* of its doctrines, as they are differently represented by many eminent divines who have undertaken to explain them. This objection was the subject of a private correspondence between two persons, one of whom [the objector] had taken his ideas of the unanimity of the jews and mahometans, chiefly from the accounts given of them in the two little histories of Dr Lancelot Addison.*

The conclusion is so little connected with the premises, and so evidently founded upon a false fact, that it is not worth any other confutation, than a bare reference to other

* The one intituled, *The present State of the Jews, wherein is contained an exact account of their customs secular and religious.* The other, intituled, *The first state of Mahomedism, or an Account of the Author and Doctrines of that Imposture.*

authors who have given more accurate accounts of the sects and divisions among the jews and mahometans, than Dr *Addison* had either inquired after, or than he thought it necessary to mention in a little work, wherein he proposed to give only a general detail of what fell within his own observation.

It seemed to be of more consequence to obviate a position of a divine of our own country, (which the objector had brought by way of strengthening his argument) viz. that "it was not necessary that christianity should continue in the same state in which the apostles left it." This being explained to mean, that it *was* necessary christianity should accommodate itself to the various policies which the states and kingdoms that received it should employ to promote their greatness and power respectively, implied such a *mutability* both in the doctrines and duties of christianity, as appears from the scriptures to be utterly inconsistent with the design, as well as the purity and simplicity of that gracious dispensation; and must create the utmost uncertainty among christians, what foundation they should have for their faith, or what rule for their manners.

Some people might possibly expect, that in a disquisition of this sort, an explicit answer should be returned to the question, *What*

is Christianity? and might say, that the answer here given to those writers who are for accommodating it to the turn and temper of the times, is rather shewing what christianity is not, than what it is.

But, let us proceed as far as we may upon sure grounds. *Est aliquid prodire tenus, si non datur ultra.*

Grotius has observed, that "most people think the whole christian religion consists in what is professed among the party to which they respectively adhere." If such people can be persuaded seriously and diligently to examine the writings pointed out to them as the only records in which the genuine account of true christianity is preserved, they will not only have the advantage of correcting their own party prejudices, but of getting a sufficient answer to the question, *What is Christianity?*

I say, a *sufficient* answer; that is to say, an answer sufficient for *their own* satisfaction; such an answer as perhaps no man else could give for them.

Bishop Burnet hath said of the ever memorable Algernon Sidney, "that he seemed to be a christian in a particular form of his own." I am of opinion, that this may be said of every

every man who reads the scriptures with a view of forming from thence an idea of true christianity; and I own I should be inclined to question the authenticity of that man's christianity, who professes to be a christian in *any* form that is *not* his own. The Bishop tells us farther, "that *Sidney* thought christianity was "to be like a divine philosophy in the mind; "but was against all public worship, and "every thing that looked like a church."* Upon which it is remarked by the author of the memoirs prefixed to his discourses on government, that "though Mr *Sidney* was an "enemy to all civil establishments of christi- "anity, it does not follow from thence, that "he was against all public worship."† But perhaps had *Sidney* been examined upon this head himself, it might have turned out, that, in his opinion, this *divine* philosophy, imbibed and planted in the mind, by the study of the scriptures, was sufficient for salvation, abstracted from all consideration of public worship, or connection with a visible church; an opinion which differs very little, if at all, from that which imports, that church membership is not necessary to salvation, and which is held

* Hist. O. T. fol. vol. i. p. 538.

† P. 28. of the folio edition of 1751.

held at this day by some who are by no means to be suspected of heterodoxy.*

We are told in the life of Sir Philip Sidney, that just before his death, "he called unto him the ministers, who were all excellent men, of divers nations, and before them made such a confession of christian faith as no book but the heart can truly and feelingly deliver."† These divines of divers nations, must also have been of divers sects or denominations of christians, and it would perhaps have been no easy matter to deliver a written creed that would have satisfied them all. Perhaps that was none of Sir Philip's care. He gave them one therefore, dictated by the *divine philosophy in his mind*; and died a *christian after a form of his own*. Algernon Sidney might possibly pay some regard to the religious sentiments of his noble kinsman, and adopt them as a family precedent.

I might indeed have given Gregory Nazianzen's definition, *Christianity is the imitation of the divine nature*.* But a professed disputant

* See Bishop Warburton's Sermons, vol. ii. serm. xiii. on Luke ix. 49.

† Biographia Britanica. Sir Philip's Art. Rem. [R].

‡ *Χριστιανισμός ἐστὶ τῆς θεῆς φωνῆς μιμήσις*. It is the motto of Dr Cudworth's sermon on 1 Cor. xv. 57. But perhaps, was intended to be set before that on 1 John ii. 3, 4.

tant would have known his business very imperfectly, if he had omitted to ask, what was meant by the *divine nature*? which might have led to a discussion of ten thousand opinions of philosophers and fathers, into which I have neither time nor inclination to enter.

St James's definition was much nearer at hand. *Pure religion and undefiled before God even the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* If any one should tell me, that the *charitable visitation* and *spotless life* here mentioned, are only the *fruits* of religion, and that we are still left to inquire by what doctrines or principles they are brought forth, I would chuse only to answer, *Go thou and do likewise, and thou shalt know more of the doctrines*, both with respect to their origin and real meaning, than the greatest divine upon earth can exhibit, with all his definitions, axioms, and criticisms.

The *Interests of Religion*, the subject of the third of these discourses, is an expression to be met with in an hundred books, written with very different, and often contradictory views, all however upon the pretence of serving religion, and promoting its interests. Every donation to the church or churchmen; every superstitious ceremony intruded into the worship of God; every compulsive method

thod of inforcing agreement in dogmatical propositions of artificial theology, have formerly been considered as proper means of advancing the *interests of religion*; and, if we may judge from the language of many in the present times who should know better, that mistaken idea is still retained, notwithstanding what the reformation may have done for us in other respects. The common people are but too apt to give into such notions as these, and should therefore be cautioned not to be imposed upon by a plausible term, which may lead them to hope, that they are promoting their own spiritual interest, while they are only forwarding the honor and profit of some particular society, whose regard for the true interests of religion may be but very faint, and remote from the more immediate object of their establishment.

The *last* discourse in this little collection, is meant for a vindication of those who have written or acted in favour of a reformation of the church, against an accusation, that they were endeavouring to subvert the ecclesiastical constitution of their country as by law established.

The merits of the objection, as well as of the defence, will depend upon the true answer to the questions, whether the civil magistrate,

strate, *professing himself a christian and a protestant*, hath a right to establish what religion he thinks fit, independently of any regard to the christian scriptures; and whether, in fact, the British magistrate considers himself as invested with any such power?

It is acknowledged, that the heathen magistrate, who had nothing to controll him but the speculations of a few philosophic geniuses, to which he was not obliged to pay any regard, might establish all the superstitions of an idolatrous worship, at his pleasure, multiply the objects of it, and prescribe the belief of doctrines suitable to it, whenever he found it more convenient for the administration of his government. Mahomet likewise, being the author of a new sect, had a right, where he was acknowledged as the head of it, to establish what rites and doctrines he thought proper, and to enforce the observation of them by whatever penalties he judged might be most effectual for that purpose. The popish magistrate too, rejecting the scriptures as the rule and foundation of his establishment, consistently enough assumes to himself the right of adopting any doctrines, fictitious traditions, and idolatrous ceremonies, and of imposing them upon the people who admit his authority, by whatever kind of violence will best answer his ends. There is nothing in the doctrines of any of these religions

ligions to check the spirit of superstition and intolerance, or the influence of fraud and imposture in any degree.

But the christian and protestant magistrate is limited to a narrower province. In matters of religion the christian scriptures are his rule, as well as that of his people, and the observance of that rule, in establishing religion by law, is a fundamental condition of his authority. Whenever therefore there is in his system of religion any essential deviation from this rule, an attempt to bring it back to its acknowledged foundation, can be no derogation to his authority, which *ex hypothesi*, is none when he adopts a different rule of establishing religion than his own principles of government will admit of.*

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* "I am aware," says a judicious writer, "of the strength of all those *political* pleas for our present forms, which proceed upon the strange principle, that the magistrate has a right to connect himself with that sect of religionists which happens to be the largest, in order to carry on the business of government with the greatest facility. I call this principle *strange*, not as seeing it in the same light with our opponents; for their view is consistent enough. They consider the magistrate as determined in favour of one set of opinions, by attending only to his political interest, or his power; while we consider him,

nor

The great advocate * for the unlimited power of the civil magistrate in matters of religion, thinks he says a great deal when he affirms, in aid of his argument, that "it is scarce possible to name or invent an opinion more absurd in its self, or more hurtful to society, or more fatal to the cause of piety and virtue, than many of those which have been actually maintained by men who called themselves christians."

Very

"not only as a political, but as a religious being, who is to be determined in favour of truth by a regard to moral interest. Upon their view any religion is entitled by its majority to his alliance; but upon our's, christianity must be his choice if he be a christian, as he will answer for that choice; and the Bible only must be his standard, if he be a protestant, (or in other words, has declared against the interpretations of men) and would wish to be consistent." *Letters, &c. ut supra, p. 43.*) The author of an *Essay on Establishments in Religion*, seems not to have had the remotest idea of these obligations of the christian and protestant magistrate. His system was formed on the plan of the *Book of Alliance*, in which the church and its utilities, were substituted for truth and the bible. But it did not so well become Dr Balguy to pass by this constitutional view of the British establishment of religion in silence, as these excellent letters were published some months before his memorable charge was delivered. It is not a compliment to a particular writer in a high station, that will excuse this contemptuous disregard of so important a consideration as is suggested in the passage above cited.

* Dr Balguy.

Very true; and not only *maintained*, but *established* by men who called themselves *christian magistrates*; and who consequently have had the power of doing ten thousand times more mischief with them than could be done by any private wronghead, or by any sect of wrongheads, whose opinions the sober conscientious christian was at full liberty to oppose and reject, without the peril of losing life or limb, or being excluded from the reasonable and lawful means of his subsistence.

But this is not the place to enlarge upon this subject. While Dr Benjamin Dawson's excellent *Letter* to the clergy of the archdeaconry of *Winchester*, and the no less excellent *Plea of the Petitioners stated and vindicated*, remain unanswered, no competent judge of the controversy will envy the author of the discourse which occasioned these two tracts, the complements that may have been paid him, as the finisher of the debate, and the irrefragable champion of the PROTESTANT CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

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FOUR DISCOURSES.

DISCOURSE I.

*On the Duty of a Christian Minister under
the obligation of conforming to a national
Religion, established by the Civil Powers.*

THE wisdom of human governments
is then most evidently and effec-
tually justified, when the duties allotted
to the different classes of its subjects, are
laid out upon such plans, and enforced
by such regulations, as have the most
immediate tendency to promote the safe-
ty, benefit, and felicity of the whole

community. Among others, the province of those who have been appointed to instill the principles, and to cultivate the influence of religion upon the minds of the people, has ever been esteemed of especial importance. Such an order of men, to fulfil their original designation, must of course be concerned for, and connected with persons of every rank and station, and under a particular obligation to recommend the practice of virtue, and to furnish expedients of social peace and order, upon principles and considerations, which go deeper than the encouragement of temporal rewards, or the terror of present punishments have been found to reach.

But though this has been the general, and almost the universal notion of the utility of such a body of men as the clergy, even so long as religion and civil government have been thought necessary,

not

not only for the welfare, but for the very existence of civil society, yet nothing, upon examination, will be found more discordant than this theory, when compared with the corrupt practice of ancient governments in the uses they made of religious institutions, and of the men who officiated in the public ministrations of them.

The wisdom of God comprised the whole Jewish system, both of civil and ecclesiastical polity, in the same code of laws, without any confusion however, or any interference of either department with the other. But though these provinces were kept sufficiently distinct in the infancy of the Hebrew republic, yet in process of time, there were considerable deviations from the original plan, as may be seen in the scripture-history of this people, insomuch that in the decline of their national strength and importance,

the respective provinces of their civil and ecclesiastical magistrate were so confounded, as not only to obstruct the course of civil justice, but likewise to preclude all the real benefit and edification which was originally intended by the institution of their religious ordinances.*

The heathen magistrates were so sensible of the political uses to which their religion might be adapted, that they took upon themselves, not only the establishment

* *Jer. v. 31.* For what happened after the Captivity, see LOWMAN on the civil government of the Hebrews, p. 235. *Ij homines [Levitæ sc.] summam potestatem nacti, rempublicam quidem ditissimam maximamque fecere, sed ipsi inter se, dum de imperio, honoribus, gloria certabant, divina et humana promiscua habuere. Ita nihil ad pietatem modestiamque illis sanctissimum nomen religionis profuit, quos ex cæterorum civium communione selegerat sibi seposueratque olim Deus, uti inter sacra ceremoniasque procul ambitione, ætatem agerent.* *Cuneus De Rep. Hebr. Lib. i. cap. xv. p. iii.*

ment of the public ritual, but the inspection and controul of the priests and other religious ministers, in the use of it, and prescribed from time to time, such variations in the public service, even with respect to the objects of public worship, as either the exigencies of government, or the temporary superstition of the people might seem to require.

It is evident that this interposition of the civil magistrate, must make the priest a merely political character. By such a minister, a better sort of religion than that of the Pagans, could not be taught upon any permanent principle of truth and reason, as the principle could not always be accommodated to the supposed exigencies of the state; and if, in contemplation of the principle, the priest had deviated from the prescribed methods of his ministry, his office would have been immediately superseded, and the man

himself treated as a factious and seditious disturber of the public repose.*

The

* Cum multa divinitus, Pontifices, a majoribus nostris inventa atque instituta sunt, tum nihil præclarior, quam quod vos *eisdem* et religionibus deorum immortalium, et summæ republicæ præesse voluerunt; ut amplissimi et clarissimi cives rempublicam bene gerendo, pontifices religiones sapienter interpretando, rempublicam conservarent. *Cic. pro Domo. initio. P. Manutius*, in a note upon this passage, would have us believe this was more than a complement to the Pontiffs for the time being; and that it had been so from the beginning. But Manutius was a zealous papist, and by this means, got a precedent for his own pontiff's temporal dominion. Dr. Potter informs us from Plato, that the same was the case at Athens, and most of the Græcian cities. "In Ægypt," says the same learned man, "the Kings were all Priests." *Arch. Græc.* 1764. vol. 1. p. 203. Hence some have imagined, that Moses, *Exod.* xix. 6. borrowed the idea of a *Kingdom of Priests*, when the Israelites in general should be so far beyond the Ægyptians in dignity, that every man should be a Priest, and every Priest a King. In the LXX. it is βασιλευς ιερειυμα, a *Royal Priesthood*, the very term used by St. Peter, 1 Ep. ii. 9. and appropriated to his fellow-christians. Which passage, taken along

The High-priesthood was in the Jewish as well as the Heathen governments, frequently in the hands of the supreme minister of civil justice, the consequence

And 4

along with that, Rev. i. 6. cannot, however, be applied to Christians in the same respects as it was to the Jews; as hath been well observed by *Grotius*, who supposeth it to allude to the privilege every Israelite had of sacrificing the Paschal Lamb, without the aid of a Levitical Priest. Many wild things have been inferred from this text, by enthusiasts of different denominations: nor have men of more learning and sobriety been of the same mind in their interpretations of it. The Popish Commentators, and some also of our own elder divines, have been superabundantly cautious, that *common Christians* should take no encouragement from this text to encroach upon the clerical province, derived, as they say, from the apostles. But let the civil magistrate look to that, so far as *forms and externals* are concerned. The commonest Christian among us may lawfully derive from this text an *internal independency*, a *sovereignty of conscience*, with respect to what he hath to offer to God, whether matters of faith or worship, and in this sense, EVERY CHRISTIAN IS HIS OWN PRIEST.

of which would be, an implicit obedience to his will, not only of the priests and ministers of the lower orders, but of the body of the people; and this, being the product of a slavish fear, would leave no room for the exercise of reason and liberal reflection, and consequently no distinction in the mind of the superstitious religionist, overawed by his reverence for the ecclesiastical character, between the genuine principles of piety and virtue, and the dictates of impiety and sensual appetite, when either happened to be the object of any religious institution.*

In

* Concerning the High-priesthood among the heathens, the fact is out of dispute. Dr. Prideaux informs us, that at the time that Menelaus purchased the High-priesthood over Jason's head, 2 *Maccab.* iv. 26. "the High-priest of the Jews had then, and for some ages past, the sole temporal government of his nation, first under the Persian, and afterwards under the Macedonian Kings." *Connection*, part. ii. b. iii. p.

In this state of political subordination, our blessed Saviour found the religion both of the Jews and Gentiles, and consequently

161. edit. 1718. It is an insignificant distinction that the learned historian there makes, *viz.* "that the temporal power was derived from the King, and the ecclesiastical from divine authority." It is plain the whole compounded power was purchased of the King, and the corrupt purchaser would without doubt, when the exigencies of his temporal government required it, make the ecclesiastical system subservient to the political without any scruple. And it is probable that, for this purpose, many of the arbitrary traditions mentioned in the New Testament, (*Mark* vii. 4. 8.) had their beginning in these times. The idolatrous corruptions in the Jewish worship, were of earlier date, and the effect undoubtedly of the superstition of their own monarchs, who had the priests under their command, and by some means or other, influenced them to comply with their idolatrous rites; and when the conscientious part of them refused to conform, they appointed others of different tribes of a more pliable disposition. See *1 Kings*, xii. 31. xiii. 33. *2 Chron.* xi. 14, 15. xiii. 9, 10, 11. But there was another class of men, who, under

frequently without any, or at least with a very small portion of its proper influence upon the human mind; nor is it at all wonderful, that his divine commission should imply, that religion could not be restored to its natural and original energy, otherwise than by putting the preachers and ministers of it under very different obligations from those, under which their Jewish

under the political managements of their wicked Kings, were accessaries to their corruptions in the weightier matters of the law, as the time-serving priests were in ritual worship. These were their *Prophets*, the preachers of moral doctrine among the people, as well as messengers of good and evil. It appears from the history of the Old Testament, that the prophets were considered as Counsellors of State, even the true prophets to their good Kings. And to this use likewise were their false prophets put by their wicked Kings, as appears from the history of Ahab (1 Kings, xxii. 2 Chron. xviii.) who had no fewer than four hundred of them in his service.

Jewish and Gentile superiors had laid them.

And therefore, as our Lord came into the world to *bear witness unto the truth*, and to preach and propagate the gospel of truth among people of all ranks and denominations, without any regard to the carnal prejudices or the political interests of the powers of this world, He chose his preachers and ministers out of a sort of men who were strangers to the intrigues and refinements of human policy, and who, though they were full of the expectation of a temporal Messiah, would be the more easily weaned from this prepossession, in consideration, that persons in their low condition, and of their slender accomplishments, could form no very sanguine hopes of being much more distinguished, or much better provided for, in consequence of any national revolution, than they were in their present

sent situation. Their adherence to this mistaken expectation so long, appears to have been occasioned by their suggesting to themselves, that, being chosen by Jesus to be his disciples and intimate friends, in preference to others of more eminent talents, they might have pretensions to honours and rewards in this new kingdom, to which they could not have aspired, under the government of any person with whom they had no such connection, and from whom their station and circumstances set them at a greater distance. They were, however, easily cured of this prejudice, when they came to understand, that they were the companions, not of a triumphant, but of a suffering Messiah, whom the powers of this world would treat with contempt and cruelty, and in the event with capital execution; and would be much sooner reconciled to their disappointment, than men whose conversation and acquaintance

tance with the world at large, had taught them to put a greater value upon the honours and profits of a superior station.

At the same time that they had this account of the humiliation of their Lord and Master, they were told, that they were to succede to his ministry with the same sufferings in their view, and with the same enmity from Kings and Magistrates, and the ruling powers of this world, wherever they should be called or allotted to discharge their commission.

Our Saviour's instructions to them, with respect to their preaching and propagating his gospel, prepared them for these trials, and their conduct and practice afterwards shewed, that they had profited by his admonitions. And thus all connection of this new dispensation with the political views and interests of secular authority, were entirely broken.

The

The preachers of the gospel were not to stay for the permission of civil governors to enter upon their province, or to take directions from them what doctrines they should teach, or at what times or places, or under what restrictions. The maxim that *God*, in these things, *was to be obeyed, and not man*, was a full exemption from this kind of dependence. And lest this appeal from human authority might give occasion to stigmatise them with the imputation of factious and seditious designs, their commandment was, to be the servants of all, to recommend the word of truth to the universal acceptance of the whole race of mankind by their own innocence and humility, by their disinterested charity, their unwearied diligence in preaching peace and love, as well as truth, and finally to shew by their example as well as doctrine, that the kingdom to which they were employed

to

to gain subjects, *was not a kingdom of this world.*

In whatever other respects the pastors of christian churches in the present times, may be called the successors of the apostles, they certainly succede them in this part of their obligation, that is to say, in the obligation to preach the word of God in truth and in sincerity, unawed by the powers of this world, and uninfluenced by the hope or fear of present reward or punishment; the same word which Christ himself preached, and his disciples have recorded, unadulterated with the subtile refinements and fictitious comments of vain and interested men, and without any other respect to the ordinances of man, than as they tend to promote the common edification of the christian brotherhood, and to answer the original design of the preachers office, of bringing all men *to the knowledge of the truth,*

truth, and by that means to everlasting life.

The rules and directions we have on this head, cannot be mistaken. Our Lord hath warned us of the consequences of being *ashamed of him, or of his words*, and of the fate of timid, slothful, and unprofitable servants. His apostles continued the same admonitions. *Let a man so account of us*, says St. Paul, *as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.* Moreover it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

And

* 1 Cor. iv. 1. 2. Cum doctrina christiana sit catholica, nulla habet *mysteria*, hoc est dogmata vel præcepta quæ non omnibus inculcari debeant, vocantur tamen *mysteria*, vel respectu illorum hominum qui ante tempora patefacti evangelii vixerunt, vel respectu illorum, qui tum quidem vivebant, sed suis vitiis atque præjudicatis opinionibus, aures obturabant quo minus audire atque intelligere possent. Wetstein. in Matth. xiii. 11. See *The Apology of Benjamin Ben. Mordecai*, for embracing Christianity. Lett. vii. p. 161—164.

And of the circumstances of this fidelity, he gives the following account. *Therefore, seeing we have received this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.** On other occasions he disclaims for himself, and consequently for all faithful ministers of the gospel, all considerations of *pleasing men,†* all views of *filthy lucre,‡* all *dominion over the faith* of the christian flock,§ and in one word, all regards to the interests and advantages

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of

* 2 Cor. iv. 2. Whatever the word *mysteries* may be supposed to mean in the text above cited, we see the duty of the christian steward is to *make them manifest*.

† Gal. i. 10.

‡ Acts xi. 33.—2 Cor. xii. 17.

§ 2 Cor. i. 24.

of the present world, so far as they interfered with his prospect of *finishing his course with joy*, when he should be called to give a final account of his important stewardship.

If we now reflect, in what manner the history of the Christian Church represents this example of the apostles to have been observed in subsequent times, and particularly how soon after christianity obtained a settlement under the civil power, secular views and interests were, on various pretences, intermixed with its nobler ends and tendencies, and with what evil effects the same worldly spirit has wrought upon its professed patrons and protectors, from the earliest times of its establishment to this hour; whoever, I say, reflects upon this, can hardly be insensible of the difficulties that must beset and incumber the conscientious minister of the gospel, who is desirous to discharge his

his trust with that fidelity and singleness of heart, which, as appears by the passages I have just referred to, make so considerable a part of his scriptural character.

Let us consider the case with that attention which the importance of it deserves.

And here without entering into a particular detail of the progress of corruption in the christian church, it will be sufficient to refer you to the state and complexion of popery immediately before the Protestant Reformation took place. You will find, not only the corruptions and impostures which the weak or wicked rulers of the church had pretended to derive from the records and documents of the religion they professed, and which had been increasing for fourteen hundred years, centring in the popish system, but

you will perceive in that system a number of others of mere pagan original, contrived, as it should seem, to defeat the purposes, and extinguish the vital powers of christianity, even to a greater degree than the superstition of the pagans could, of itself, have operated: inasmuch as by the hypocrisy and artful policy of the conductors of the project, it became extremely difficult to distinguish the genuine principles and doctrines of the christian dispensation, from the arbitrary, fictitious, and idolatrous ordinances which had been imposed upon the deluded people under the mask of apostolical tradition, and consequently of apostolical authority.

They who first opposed these corruptions, and contended for the necessity of a reformation of the church, plainly perceived, that this tyranny of ecclesiastical governors, and the subjection of persons
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in all stations and of all degrees to their dictates and ordinances, were wholly owing to the ignorance of the people in general of what was taught in the scriptures, which had been partly kept out of their reach, and partly discredited and undervalued by a degrading comparison of their authority with that of the church so called.*

B 3

Accord-

* When the Hussites, at the Council of *Basil*, said; that "they would receive no doctrine which was not contained in the holy scriptures," they were answered by Cardinal *Cusanus*, *Scripturas non ad ESSE, sed ad BENE ESSE Ecclesia facere, Tanto dignius verbum Dei tradi, quanto ab omni scriptura remotius. Explicandam scripturam esse juxta currentem ecclesia ritum, quâ sententiam mutante, Dei etiam judicium mutatur.* See *Dan. Gerdes' Hist. Evang. Renovat.* tom. i. p. 32. who cites *Cusanus's* 7th epistle to the Bohemians. *Heidegger, Hist. Papatus*, p. 180. cites the same words. And *Mr. Bayle*, Article *BALDUS*, Rem. (I.) has more to the same purpose from these epistles of *Cusanus*; and adds, *I love this plain dealing.* *Mr. Serces*, in his book intituled, *Popery an Enemy to Scripture*, has many instances

Accordingly the groundwork on which the early reformers proceeded, was to fix the written word of God for the rule and standard of whatever was to be taught or practised by christians, either in their public assemblies, or their more private exercises of piety and charity, with no far-

stances of this degradation and contempt of the scriptures among the popish writers. But these instances are most of them posterior to the *dawnings* of the reformation, and many of them to the Council of *Trent*; what is here proposed is, to shew the sense of the church of Rome, when she was in full security, and in no apprehension of being attacked, as she afterwards was by *Luther* and his followers. *Du Plessis*, *Myſt. Iniq.* progression 62. says, *Mandatum Cardinali Cusano ut per literas hoc axioma* [the axiom of the *Hussites*, nullum dogma extra sacram scripturam admittendum] *contunderet*. So that we see the doctrine above-cited was not *Cusanus's* private opinion, but the sense of the Council. *Du Plessis* cites other passages from these letters of *Cusanus*, besides those above-mentioned, to the same effect.

farther regard to any ordinances prescribed by a different authority, than was immediately conducive to the common edification of the brotherhood.

The first movers, indeed, of a separation from the Roman Church, do not seem to have been aware of a circumstance, which occurred to their successors, in their progress to a final settlement, namely, the necessity of forming some mode of ecclesiastical government for Protestant churches, in which scripture doctrines were to be publicly taught and professed, and public worship celebrated. The question was, whether the scriptures afforded sufficient directions for the particulars of such government, enforced by such discipline as all bodies of men in social union seemed to require?

To this question it was answered, that general directions for the administration

of ecclesiastical government were clearly laid down in Holy Writ; but not with the precision necessary for all occasions and exigencies; that it was therefore proper, that a discretionary power should be trusted with particular churches in matters of this sort, under that general precept of St. PAUL, *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

There were, however, among them, many who foresaw where this *discretionary power* would end, namely, either in usurpations of undue authority, or in perpetual feuds and contests, concerning what was *decent* and *orderly*; and they remonstrated accordingly, strongly representing, that as soon as men should deviate from the simplicity of primitive worship, and the moderation of Apostolical Government (of both which they asserted, there were clear and sufficient precedents in the New Testament) their

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disagreement about the rites to be established, and the discipline necessary to enforce the observance of them, would give rise to a *coercive* authority, which, under the pretence of procuring uniformity, would impose the same sort of bondage upon them, that they refused to bear under the dominion of the church of Rome.*

But

* *Flacius Illyricus*, however he may have suffered in his reputation for opposing *Melancthon's* concessions to the Romanists in matters of this nature, was neither so wrong in his judgment, nor so singular in his opposition, as to be either without a justification in the events he foresaw, or to stand alone in the contest. *Melancthon* wished to have Bishops established, and thought there could be no ecclesiastical polity without them; but was still for preserving evangelical liberty in matters of doctrine. But they who saw the little probability there was of this (taking their account from the use the Bishops of those days made of their power) said, that "He [*Melancthon*] could not have done a more considerable service to the popish
" cause,

But the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. It was easy to discern,

to

cause, if he had received a sum of money for pleading for it." *Adam, vit. Melancthon. p. 335.* See also *Melancthon's Letters to Camerarius, Epist. l. 4.—99, 104, 106. et alibi passim.* After some trial, he was obliged to give up his project. *ibid. p. 836.* *Melancthon* was likewise for retaining a number of popish ceremonies, as *adiaphorous*, or things indifferent; at the same time he acknowledged, that, upon protestant principles, they were marks of servility. *Illyricus* was not the only one who opposed him in this matter. How unwilling particular protestant churches were to come into this proposal, appears from the epistles *Melancthon* and his coadjutors wrote to the churches of *Nuremberg, Stetin, Hamburgh, the Marche of Brandenburg, Mansfeld, and Francford.* And to say the truth, the casuistry he made use of to reconcile these people to his *Adiaphorism*, does no great credit either to his judgment, or his ingenuity. *Vid. Epist. l. i. p. 92—108. Lond. 1642.* His defence against *Illyricus* (*ibid. p. 133*) is, in some respects, even pitiable. He is driven to say, that he was not always in earnest, that he often argued against his own opinion, and that

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to what strength and power the Romish church had arrived by the means of her mode of government. Popery was the avowed

he was much given to joking. The fact is, that this doctrine of *Adiaphorism* caused a considerable defection from *Melancthon* and his party, after the death of *Luther*, when *Melancthon*, according to *Mosheim*, made a more open profession of this doctrine, than he ventured to do in *Luther's* life-time. *Que quidem omnia efficiabant, says Mosheim, ut eo [Melancthon] principatum inter Theologos Lutheranos tenente, ecclesie pacem illam, qua sub LUTHERO usa erat, amitteret, atque multarum et acerrimarum turbarum, et disputationum scena quodammodo fieret. Inst. Hist. Eccl. Helmstad, 1764, p. 653.* The certain consequences of all trimming expedients, which *Luther* abominated, *Melancthon* has been much commended for his meek and healing spirit, and *Grotius* says he infused it into his disciples. *Melancthonis ac Johannis Arndi discipulos ferme videas bonos ac lenes; contra Calvini aspectus, et tales quales in maximam partem humani generis Deum esse sibi imaginantur. Vos. pro Pace. ed. Lond. fol. 1679, p. 656.* *Grotius*, who had his use for *Melancthon's* concessions in favour of popery, had a great advantage in setting him besides the rigid *Calvin*, though *Rivet* observes, pertinently enough, that *Grotius*

avowed enemy of the Reformers, and opposed them to great advantage with a body so compacted by government and dif-

sius was neither *bonus* nor *lenis* in characterizing the body of the Calvinists in those terms. *Apologeticus*, Lugd. Bat. 1643, p. 50. And when *Grotius* attempts to account for *Melancthon's* lenity in approving *Calvin's* dealings with *Servetus*, he comes but poorly off. *Mosheim's* character of *Melancthon* is worth notice. Mortuo LUTHERO, PHIL. MELANCTHON caput et princeps Theologorum ecclesiæ Lutheranæ fiebat, vir sine dubio magnus et egregius, verum *Luthero* multis rebus inferior, maxime vero animi robore, fortitudine atque auctoritate. Mollis enim erat, pacis et tranquillitatis præter omnem modum amans; timidus, potentiorum indignationem et iram formidans, denique is, qui amorem sibi quidem et benevolentiam comparare, non vero novarum rerum et sententiarum auctores, terrere atque metu in officio continere atque comprimere posset. &c. After which *Mosheim* proceeds to relate, what ample concessions he would have made to the church of Rome. *Illyrius* was doubtless inexcusable for his intemperate zeal; but who knows to what concessions *Melancthon's* timidity would have carried him, if he had not been so sharply attacked

discipline: and we can hardly wonder, that the weaker protestant party should begin to be in fear for their own system, and to apprehend its speedy declension, except they could cement it by something similar or equivalent to the bonds which kept the adversary firm and unbroken, under all the attacks made upon them by the Reformers.

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attacked for those he had made? No man could have answered, how far he would have gone towards complying with the whole *Interim*, step by step. He was, out of all measure, studious of peace and tranquility, and had he, from that propensity, accepted of the *Interim*, what would have become of the Reformation? It is not unreasonable to ask these questions, if we only consider, that *Melancthon* thought the authority [*Imperium*] of the Pope might be submitted to on certain conditions, for peace sake, and with a reserve to such truths as were clearly propounded in the holy scriptures. *Mosheim*, p. 655. The question would presently have been, who must be the judge of this clearness? And the answer was obvious, He who was acknowledged to have the *Imperium*.

This consideration threw them into the protection, and by natural consequence, into a dependence upon the civil powers which espoused or countenanced their separation from Rome, and which, *at the first*, afforded them their patronage so far, as to defend them from the persecution of their popish adversaries, without much interfering with their methods of propagating the protestant religion, or those regulations by which the public worship was conducted.*

In process of time, differences and contentions arising in protestant congregations,

* One instance of this we have in Bayle's Dictionary, viz. of *Lotichius*, Abbot of *Solitar*, in the county of *Hanaw*, who openly established the protestant religion in his monastery, and in all places depending upon it, in the year 1543. See his article. Mr. Bayle adds, *Lotichius* was the principal cause of the courageous resolution, which the neighbouring ministers took to reject the *Interim* in 1549.

tions, the prevailing party found it convenient to apply to the civil powers, for a legal and exclusive establishment of such doctrines and forms of worship, as they had respectively espoused: by which, in all such instances, a political connection was once more created between the church and state, which must of course have a considerable influence upon those ministerial functions annexed to the province of the clergy. In this situation of things, the stipends of ministers, and other emoluments of honour and profit, were insured to the church by the authority of the civil magistrate, and some of the more important actually conferred by him. And it can be no wonder, (the infirmities and corruptions of human nature considered) that there should be candidates for the ministry, who would have their eye upon these emoluments, more than upon the evangelical duties of their calling, and in many instances, be
more

more careful to examine what was the sense of their immediate benefactors concerning the doctrines and ordinances of religion, than what was prescribed in the written record of the commands of a Lord and Master, whose promises referred his servants for their reward to a future and a remote period.

The inconveniences arising from the merely political uses of religion, and from the compliance of the teachers of it with them, have been pointed out and complained of, as great obstructions to the free course of the word of God, by many pious, eminent, and learned divines in different protestant churches. Nor is it to be expected that our own church should be exempted from an evil which has its source in the common affections of the human mind. Upon the particular objects of these complaints I shall not dwell, referring those who desire to see what

what difficulties and embarrassments they lay in the way of a faithful minister of the gospel, to Bishop Burnet's excellent Treatise on the Pastoral Care, and the considerations offered by the same worthy Prelate on the same subject, in the Conclusion of the History of his own Times. And these things appearing now only in the light of *temptations*, which we may and ought to resist; and the moderation of the civil magistrate having discouraged all methods of force and compulsion, and thereby loosened many of the unedifying restraints upon the clergy of the establishment, as well as others, I shall only for the present, suggest the uses we ought to make of the liberty we have, consistently with the respect we owe to our superiors under whom we enjoy it, till the happy time shall come, when whatever may have even the appearance of an incumbrance upon the *free course*

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of

of the word of God, shall be effectually taken away.

Upon whatever terms, or by whatever authority we receive our office, if we take it upon us *willingly*, and of a *ready mind*, we should consider ourselves as under an indispensable obligation to that heavenly master whose stewards we are, prior to any stipulations with any particular society which calls itself christian. No such society indeed can, upon its own principles, justly require either more or less in matters of religion, than our sovereign head and governor hath prescribed in that revelation of his will, which his providence hath handed down to us in the holy scriptures. To this doctrine the church of England bears her testimony in several of her solemn forms, and in that particularly, by which our office is conferred.

In

In these circumstances, to be influenced in our public ministrations, by the hope of pleasing, or the fear of displeasing the powers of this world, must subject us to an account which we cannot think of giving with joy and satisfaction, if the Apostles of Christ have faithfully and truly stated the conditions on which they received their commission.

Simplicity and godly sincerity in preaching the gospel, are the qualifications upon which the Apostle Paul chiefly values himself, and these he opposes to *fleshly wisdom*, to *hypocrisy*, to *merchandising* or *trafficking* with the word of God, and to a view of *pleasing men*, or what he calls *preaching himself*; commending himself, as he expresses it, *to every man's conscience in the sight of God*.

What the apostle meant by *sincerity*, could hardly be made more intelligible

by words, than it is by this contrast; and yet, strange as it may be thought, there are men among us who seem to be very unwilling to understand it in this plain sense, insisting, that it is an insufficient principle to justify either teachers or hearers, when, in certain cases, it comes in competition with human authority, which they think fit to say, takes place of all private convictions, (even such as arise from studying the sacred writings) under the general directions of obedience to government.

But however the particular advocates for this doctrine may avail themselves of the advantages they derive from it, it is a doctrine which no christian and protestant church, that I know of, hath hitherto ventured to avow. It is taken for granted in them all, that whatever forms of doctrine of human composition have been received among them, as standards

dards of orthodoxy, were drawn up by men, who were *sincerely* persuaded that they were agreeable to the word of God, and who procured the establishment of them upon that *only* consideration. And that being presupposed, they could never intend to exclude their successors from acting upon the same principle, when the province of teaching devolved upon them, notwithstanding the different light in which the passages of scripture alledged by them in support of the established system, might appear to their posterity; an event which, conscious as they were of their own fallibility, they might easily foresee would certainly happen.*

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But

* I know the *sincerity* of those who revised the Common Prayer-book at the Restoration of King Charles II. has been called in question, and perhaps upon some plausible grounds. It was said, that they had it in their

But we have still better evidence of the limitations put upon human authority in matters of this nature, in the writings of the Apostles.

St.

their view rather to distress the Dissenters, than to conform the liturgical services to the terms of the word of God; and I own there is a note subjoined by Dr. Nicholls to their *Preface*, which seems to give countenance to this surmise. "It is inconceivable," says the Doctor, "what difficulties the Bishops at that time had to contend with about making the alterations. They were not only to conquer their own former sentiments, and the quick remembrance of their sufferings, together with the unreasonable demands of the presbyterian party, but they had the court to deal with likewise, who pushed on to all acts of severity, but were willing to let the odium thereof lie upon the clergy. And by the management of some great persons then in power, the minds of the episcopal clergy, and zealous conformists, were so wrought up, upon the talk of these alterations, that the Bishops who were concerned in them, found it a difficult matter to manage the temper of their friends." This is but a poor defence of these Bishops. It represents

St. Paul writing to the Philippians
(and by the way, addressing his epistle
to the Bishops and Deacons as well as
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sents them as, in some degree, the captives of their own resentments, and the tools and dupes of an iniquitous and tyrannical court, and tends to induce a suspicion of their *insincerity* in making those alterations which were established with the rest of our liturgical forms by the Bartholomew act. It is but reasonable however, that the Bishops should be heard in their own cause, and thus they plead it. " Having thus endeavoured to discharge our duties in this weighty affair, " as *in the sight of God*, and to prove our *sincerity* " therein (so far as lay in us) to the *consciences of all* " *men*; although we know it impossible (in such variety of apprehensions, humours, and interests, as are " in the world) to please all; nor can expect that men " of factious, peevish, and perverse spirits should be " satisfied with any thing that can be done in this kind " by any other than themselves; yet we have good " hope that what is here presented, and hath been by " the convocations of both provinces with great diligence examined and approved, will be also well accepted and approved by all sober, peaceable, and " truly

the congregation at large) prays, that *their love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, to the end that they might approve, or try things that are excellent,** that is to say, that they might be able to judge in what respect things that are excellent differ from things of inferior value.

But this *knowledge and understanding* were not then, any more than now, to be acquired otherwise than by examination, and by comparing the things that were

“truly conscientious sons of the church of England.” *Preface to the Common Prayer Book.* When men make such solemn appeals to God for their *sincerity* in his sight, they risque too much of their justification upon a future judgment, to be subject to man’s judgment in this world: I shall therefore only remark, that if they were *really sincere in this weighty affair*, neither their own resentments, nor the authority of the court had any share in their counsels or resolutions.

* Philippians i. 9, 10.

were to be distinguished, one with another, with impartiality and fidelity, and without trusting to the opinions or determinations of others, who had gone before them; and for what purpose? even the very important one, that they might be *sincere* and without offence till the day of Christ, which, it is implied, they could not be, without thus exercising their understanding and judgment in such disquisitions.*

And if this rule takes every intelligent christian, much more does it take every minister of the gospel out of the hands of over-ruling authority. Human authority may determine things to be *more excellent*, which a man who exercises his knowledge and judgment, may perceive to be *less excellent* even than some other things

* See *Elfner*. *Observ. Sacr.* upon these two verses, and upon Rom. ii. 18.

things which human authority may undervalue, perhaps reprobate and condemn as erroneous and heretical. To take the decision of others in such cases, where our own examination and proof is so expressly made our duty, is to act that *insincere* and *offensive* part, which must expose the credulous or indolent teacher to the sentence of the slothful servant who hid his Lord's talent, (entrusted to him for the purposes of improvement) when the Lord of that teacher cometh and reckoneth with him.

Where the spirit of the Lord is, says the same apostle, there is liberty. And by plain consequence, where liberty is not, the spirit of the Lord will not be. The man who gives up his spiritual liberty, taketh unto himself other impure spirits, with which the spirit of the Lord disdains to associate; such as the unmanly spirit of timidity, the self-seeking spirit of

of worldly discretion, the abject spirit of adulation, the sordid spirit of avarice, the domineering spirit of ambition, and too often the corrupt and contagious spirit of sensual pleasure.

It is much to be regretted, that they who undertook to establish Protestant Churches in different countries of Europe by civil sanctions, should not have been a little more attentive to the nature and genius of the christian religion, which their own principles, if adhered to, would have suggested to them, was then the most efficacious, when professed and practised with its native moderation, and in its native simplicity. The beginnings of the Reformation were indeed attended in all these countries with great difficulties, and violent struggles with powerful adversaries. But calmer times succeeded, when, if due regard had been paid to the healing dictates of christianity, many of those

those evils and scandals might have been avoided, which give a serious reader of those histories pain and disgust.

The civil powers who espoused the protestant religion, seem, in their provisions for peace and order in their respective churches, to have been too apprehensive of the disturbances which they supposed a more enlarged toleration of private judgment would have produced. They did not foresee that the establishment of one system of doctrine, and one mode of worship, with so undue a preference, and so many superior advantages above the rest, would necessarily foment those divisions which they intended to avoid; and drive them at length, in their pursuit of an ideal uniformity, into those very unchristian measures of coercion which had been the objects of their abhorrence in the church of Rome, and

and none of the least justifiable motives they had for coming out of her.

Experience, and the free discussion of the grounds of christian liberty, has given us a more distinct view of the mistakes of our predecessors, some of which have accordingly been rectified. But more still remains to be done, and it is to be feared will remain, till the civil powers feel the inconveniences of confining christian edification by political covenants, which prevent even the state from receiving the benefits that a more diffusive encouragement of the *conscientious principle* among its subjects, would unquestionably derive upon it.

I enter not into the controversy, how far dissenters may or may not be justified in their separation from the established church? After the separation of the protestant church of England from that of
Rome,

Rome, there ought never to have been any controversy of that sort. The common justification of us all is, *Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*; and that being presupposed, the solidity of any man's reasons for his nonconformity, cannot be estimated by the political rules of any human establishment whatever.

On the other hand, let it not be said, that the clergy of the established church are attached to it by secular motives *only*. There may be a *political dissent*, as well as a *political conformity*. There may be among us, conscientious and liberal-minded men, who are dissatisfied with, not to say distressed, by the bonds which their full conformity to the legal establishment lays upon them. Different men may be affected by these, in different degrees; and *all* who feel the burden, may not only wish, but ought to solicit relief

relief from those who have the power to give it. But it will not follow from their not immediately obtaining such relief, that *every* clergyman so circumstanced, is obliged to quit his station in the church, and to seek his satisfaction in some other religious community, or his bread in some other employment. In cases of this kind, turn which way you will, there are difficulties too substantial to be got over by *every* man, and too important to the man himself, to be submitted to the judgment of others.

But whatever scruples or anxieties a conscientious clergyman may have in the course of his conformity to our present church establishment, he has one comfort, namely, that he is not precluded by any circumstance in his more solemn admission to his office, from making full proof of his ministry, in the most substantial and important parts of it, according

ding to the awful directions he has in the holy scriptures.

Let him look round him, and he will see calls and occasions for his vigilance and his labours, upon which his church puts no restraint, of far more consequence both to himself and the public, than his attention to those inconveniences which must incumber, in part, all religious societies of human institution, perhaps to the end of time.

There is nothing which more evidently proves the divine mission of the apostles, than the exact description they have given us of the last days which were immediately to precede the close and consummation of this worldly system. As we approach nearer to those days, we perceive all those evil habits and dispositions increasing among mankind, which the apostles gave as the marks and tokens of
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of *perillous times*, and which were intended as warnings to those whose province it should be to apply the correctives of the gospel, to reform the principles and manners of that generation of men, among whom their lot should fall.

These warnings we have in the third chapter of St Paul's Epistle to Timothy, when the first heat of persecution was probably over, and when the freedom of the christians from the terrors of it, had left them no enemies so dangerous and formidable, as their own irregular passions ; and they were given to Timothy, a preacher and minister of the christian religion, to awaken his circumspection, to direct him to the best expedients of providing against those evils which were most likely to corrupt the integrity of his flock, and debase the spirit of their

religion, by the impure mixture of selfish views and secular interests, utterly inconsistent with that purity of heart and innocence of life, which were the principal distinctions of the christian brotherhood. From Timothy these admonitions have descended to us, as undoubtedly they were intended to do, and it is incumbent upon us to make that use of them, which a careful observation of persons and facts within our respective departments, may enable us to do.

Our business indeed as private pastors, is chiefly with the particular congregations where our lot is fallen; to these we are more especially bound to shew ourselves *patterns of good works*, and, in our doctrine, to shew *uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech which cannot be condemned, that they, says the Apostle,*

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*of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.**

It is easy to see, that, under these general directions, many specific duties are comprised, which various occasions and incidents may bring into practice. They have respect to every sort and every means of seduction, to which our respective flocks may be exposed, whether from the profligate corrupters of our public manners, the ignorant zeal of weak enthusiastic teachers, or the more refined sophistry of those subtle and designing emissaries, who would enslave their minds, by bringing them under subjection to an idolatrous and tyrannical superstition.

In a world which is so much given to the study and cultivation of secular wis-

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dom, a religion of so great purity as the christian, would run the hazard of being totally neglected, if the nominal profession of it was not found necessary for certain political purposes, which however it could not be made to answer, if it were only to be professed in its native simplicity: a consideration that has given birth to a thousand formalities in the different establishments of it, all which may be practised without producing the least emotion of that *power of godliness* upon the heart, which was felt by the first converts, upon the preaching of the apostles.

And here it is, that is to say, in our endeavours to revive this influence, that we must expect our sincerity and perseverance will be put to the utmost test. It is an undertaking next to desperate, to attempt to bring back a careless and

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dissipated people to the pure and uncorrupted fountains of evangelical truth and piety, where so many hypoerites and plausible professors teach them to put so high a value upon mere formalities,

But it is a work indispensably annexed to our calling, and therefore to be undertaken at all events; and though in the progress of it, we should fall upon expedients that may grate upon the secular and political accommodations, to which some parts of our established system may seem to give countenance, let us remember, that the *wisdom which is from above, is without partiality,** that it is our especial commission to inforce the *power* of godliness, and that wherever this is our aim, as it is always our duty, it will be of very little consequence to our final

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* James iii. 17.

account, what becomes of those *forms* of it, by whatever precedents or examples they are recommended, which derive not their authority from the word of God.

But it is a work indispensably annexed to our calling, and therefore to be undertaken at all events; and though in the progress of it, we should fall upon expedients that may grate upon the secular and political accommodations, to which some parts of our established system may seem to give countenance, let us remember, that the reason which is from above, is without partiality; that it is our official commission to enforce the power of Godliness, and that wherever this is our aim, as it is always our duty, it will be of very little consequence to our final

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James III. 17.



DISCOURSE II.

On the Questions, *What is Christianity?*
and *Where is it to be learned?*

IT has been observed, that if you should ask a Jew or a Mahometan concerning their faith respectively, each of them would give you a clear and satisfactory account of his religion, and for the most part, consistent with what another Jew or Mahometan would give, in answer to the question, what is Judaism? or what is Mahometism? Whereas were you to ask the two first christians you meet, one after the other, what is Christianity? you would have two answers as different from each other, as the answer of the

Jew or the Mahometan would be from either of them.

But this is a reflection which most probably was never justified by a fair experiment; and we might safely deny the fact, if the trial should be made in similar circumstances.

Our intercourse with Jews or Mahometans is not so frequent and familiar, as to let us into the private sentiments of individuals among them, upon the subject of religion. We generally content ourselves with the accounts given of their respective doctrines and institutions in their authentic books, the Laws of Moses, and the Koran of Mahomet, and these, we suppose, exhibit the uniform standards of their faith and worship. But were we to converse among them in their respective settlements, or where the greatest numbers of them reside; with the

Jews,

Jews, for instance, at Amsterdam, or with the Turks at Constantinople, as familiarly as we do with our fellow christians in our own country, we should find them in each department as much divided from each other, as christians of the most different sects are supposed to be. Nor is it possible it should be otherwise, considering the multitude and variety of traditional doctrines and precepts, which have been added to the Mosaic Code and Ritual, and the many different comments of the Mahometan Doctors on the Koran, according as each was disposed to follow the head of his sect.*

But laying these comparisons out of the case, the question, *What is Christianity?*

* See *Mosheim Instit. Hist. Eccles.* 1764, p. 234, and the authors cited by him. But particularly, *The Apology of Benjamin Ben Mordecai*, letter i. p. 4-5.

nity? is a question of importance, particularly to the teachers of it, and a question which they ought frequently to put to themselves. For though the evangelists and apostles, when they are consulted, furnish us with easy, plain, and sufficient answers to every article of christian obligation to which such a question may be supposed to relate, yet by conversing with men and books that fall in our way, our attention may be insensibly drawn off from the great articles of our faith and duty, to contemplations upon points, which, though they may be recommended to us as inferences and deductions from the scriptures, have really no more to do with the genuine principles laid down in those sacred records, than the conclusions drawn by the Talmudists from detached texts of the Pentateuch, have with the unadulterated Institutes of Moses.

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An intelligent Christian might say to a multitude of these reasoners, as the Dæmoniac said to the exorcists, *Jesur I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?*

One presents you with a complex artificial explanation of particular points of doctrine, expressed in scripture in general terms, frames an ingenious hypothesis, and by the help of a little criticism, and an unreasonable number of postulata, finishes a complete orthodox summary, which you are to take for your rule in matters of doctrine, so far at least as the subject extends.

If you are satisfied with this, it is so far well, you are obliged to the operator, and owe him a complement for his industry

dustry and sagacity. But be not scandalized at those who are not so ready to take his word, and who possibly may tell you, when they have examined the work, "This is not Christianity, neither "is Christianity to be learned from it,

Another, strongly impressed with a notion of the necessity of what is called church communion, and of the necessity of uniformity to such communion, sets himself to contrive a scheme of church discipline and government, to be enforced by exclusive privileges to the obedient, and a mortifying *preterition*, or perhaps by censures and penalties upon the unfortunate nonconformist. And this being wrought up with all the art and dexterity of an adept in this kind of science, is offered to the public as an expedient to cure all differences and disorders in christian societies.

It would be hard to deny this ingenious artificer his due portion of thanks and praise, and he certainly ought to have it from those who desire to be at ease in the honours and possessions which their mode of professing christianity derives upon them, and for whom it is so convenient, that the curiosity of those who are forward to pry into the political construction of the machine, should be effectually restrained. But whatever advantages of the temporal kind systems of this complexion may intend to produce, it is great odds that they have little countenance from the dictates of christianity, whose genius and spirit are most commonly of a different cast from the principles which give rise to these lucubrations, unless there has been some strange revolution in the christian republic, which hath determined, that what the blessed Jesus reproved in the Scribes and Pharisees with no little asperity, should now be

be not only most highly esteemed among men, but have the concurrence of heaven into the bargain.

When you inquire, what principle of the christian religion it is which sets these men to work, you are referred to several passages in the Apostolical Epistles, where the disciples are exhorted, *to be of the same mind one towards another.* To speak all the same thing, and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment, and this, that there might be no schisms or divisions among them.† To be of the same mind in the Lord.‡ To be all of one mind,§ and the like.*

Now

* Rom. xii. 16.

† 1 Cor. i. 10. 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

‡ Phil. iv. 2.

§ 1 Pet. iii. 8. It may be questioned whether the expressions, *to auto pherest, Katalphēscēas ēi to auto voi,*

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Now allowing these and the like texts to press uniformity in matters of faith and doctrine, I will not ask, what authority they give to these speculatists to ob-

Kai ἐν τῇ ἀδελφύᾳ γυναι, ὁμοφωνοῦτε ἑαυτοῖς, relate to theological dogmata in these passages, or to some other subjects of division among the disciples. The passage, 1 Cor. i. 10, seems to give the greatest countenance to the interpretation which represents doctrines to have been the subjects of this schism. But as it happens, the occasion of the exhortation is told us by the apostle himself, and refers to a very different matter, namely, to the Corinthians' valuing themselves upon the worth or dignity of the minister by whom each was converted or instructed respectively. It would indeed have been strange, if these Corinthians should have given offence by their differences in matters of doctrine, to the same apostle who, v. 4, 5, gives God thanks for the grace that was given them in Jesus Christ, so as to be enriched in him, in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. Had Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, encouraged these distinctions among the Corinthians, they could not probably have main-

obtrude upon others, their own compositions abounding with so large mixtures of human inventions, as the proper expedients of unity, upon the christian church; I would only desire to know whenever such artificial forms have been known to produce the perfect concord supposed to be recommended by the apostle, even under the most rigorous establishment?

maintained their respective parties otherwise than by teaching different doctrines. But this we know was not the case; not to mention that the apostle would have specified in the course of his reprobation, the particular doctrine which each of the schismatics held, if that had been the matter in dispute; as he does, *Rom. xiv.* and elsewhere. Mere pride, and the desire of preference and superiority, seems to have been the only occasion of this contention at Corinth, and no deviation from the simplicity of the gospel-doctrine. *Bengelius* well observes that the *λεγειτε το αυτο πας*, v. 10. refers to *εκατος υμων λεγει*, v. 12. and to that only, though the passage has been abusively applied to the uniform profession of the same theological propositions. But see *Vitrings Obj. Sect. 2. cap. xii.*

blishment? If, on the other hand, they have rather been instrumental in promoting feuds and animosities among christians, as history and experience bear testimony, they are expedients of no value, and should be exchanged for others of a more legitimate original, and of a better tendency.

But whatever the apostles might wish and desire, and exhort, in these and the like passages, we certainly know they did not succeed in their endeavours to bring about a perfect unanimity among the members of the churches which they had planted. There were differences among them in matters of no little importance.* With respect to those opinions and the ritual practices founded upon them, which tended to defeat the

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* See Vitringa *Observationes Sacre*, lib. iv. cap. 9.

purposes of the christian revelation, the apostle Paul was sufficiently peremptory in his opposition, as appears by what he wrote to the Galatians. But his zeal even there, is shewn with the greatest resentment against those who were for encroaching upon the christian liberty of the Galatian converts, by confining them to decisions and forms for which they had no authority in the terms of the gospel.

When in the full enjoyment of the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, some others differed in points which might be differently understood, and espoused by different persons, consistently with their equally holding the head, Jesus Christ, the same apostle allows of a latitude little consistent with the rigorous expedients of uniformity, which were afterwards contrived, upon a pretence that

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Christianity could not be supported without them.

In these exigencies he preaches up a toleration one among another, that would hardly be admitted in these days, by the most moderate of our modern disciplinarians. He forbids them to judge one another, as having no authority of that kind. He prescribes, that every man should be satisfied and convinced in his own mind, and content himself with the testimony of his own conscience, even in matters of faith, and to leave others who differed from him to their own proper master and judge. He gives them a general rule, not to be wise above what is written,* and writing to the Philip-

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pians,

* 1 Cor. iv. 6. *Elser* thinks this passage does not refer to the scriptures in general, but ought to be translated, *ut in nobis discretis, non magnificenter de vobis*

prians, iii. 15. he refers those who may think differently from others, whom he calls *perfect*,* to some future revelation,

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vobis sentire [φρονεῖν] *quam scriptum est*; and adds, *nampe in hac Epistola, verbis præcedentibus*. Meaning, I suppose, (for to me this is not perfectly intelligible) the sentiments Paul had expressed concerning himself and Apollos. But *Grotius* well observes, *Συμπληρωμα*, (*scriptum est*) in his libris semper ad libros veteris Testamenti refertur. And accordingly *Bengelius*, with great judgment, refers back to chap. iii. 19. 20. where two passages are cited, the one from Job v. 13. the other from Psalm xciv. 11. both implying the deceitfulness and vanity of human wisdom, and to which it is most probable the apostle here alludes; and, consequently, refers them to the *wisdom of God* in the scriptures, for the doctrines they should espouse, without respect to the wisdom or the talents of their teachers. Some have conjectured, that *Apollos*, who was an eloquent man, and mighty (well versed) in the scriptures, but imperfectly instructed in the way of God, might, notwithstanding the pains taken with him by *Aquila*, at *Ephesus*, carry with him into *Achaia* some peculiarities in his way of teaching, not altogether agreeable to the simplicity of the gospel. *Acts* xviii. 24—27.

* *Perfectos*, hic vocat, in rebus divinis optime versatos. *Gros.*

as if the wisdom or the judgment, even of the *perfect*, might not be sufficient for them to depend upon.

But we are told by some of those who plead for the expedience of particular formularies of doctrine or discipline, "that these tolerating methods were mere concessions of necessity, that *Paul* and his fellow labourers had no power to act otherwise, as the civil magistrate might take umbrage at their exercising a sort of polity, which would appear to interfere with his absolute authority. But that the case would be very different when the magistrate became christian, took the teachers of that religion into his protection, and gave the sanction of his authority to the ecclesiastical discipline they recommended to be established."

The case *then* indeed *did* become very different, so different, that he who reads the ecclesiastical histories of those times with a christian spirit, will be tempted to wish, that many of those christian magistrates had followed the example of a heathen magistrate, of whose conduct on occasion of a religious dispute, we have an account in our own scripture.

The character given of Gallio, passes with many in the present times, for that of a man totally void of all religious impressions, for that, in short, of a profane infidel, who neither feared God nor regarded man: a prejudice which arises from the expression, that *he cared for none of those things*.

It may indeed be questioned, whether, this observation of the evangelist relates to Gallio's refusal to hear the accusation against Paul, or to the subsequent treatment

ment of Sosthenes; nor is it very material to what part of the transaction this indifference may be applied. It is sufficient that we are not left without Gallio's reason why he declined to take cognizance of the matter in dispute between Paul and his accusers.

The charge was, that Paul persuaded men to worship God, contrary to the Jewish law; to which, without entering either into the matter of fact or the matter of right, this wise and worthy magistrate thus answers,

If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it, for I will be no judge of such matters.

It had been happy for Gallio, had he

listened to St Paul upon the subject of this accusation. One may presume, from the character transmitted to us of his good sense, his sweet disposition, and inflexible probity,* that his conversion to christianity must have been the consequence, and the man himself an honour and an ornament to the profession.

But his conduct in disclaiming in the person of a civil magistrate, the province of a judge in a dispute on a religious subject, which implied no private injury to any individual, no criminal offence in the moral demeanour of the accused party, nor any disturbance of the public peace, was not the less agreeable to reason or the dictates of christianity, than if he had been a christian himself.

Gallio.

* See the proofs exhibited in Wetstein's Greek Testament, of Gallio's personal virtues, on *Acts* xviii. 12 vol. ii. p. 575.

Gallio, say some divines, was a heathen, and little concerned about the fate of the jewish religion, which was then upon the eve of its dissolution. The providence of God therefore so ordered it, that this man's indifference on this occasion, should remove the obstruction which the complaint of the jews might otherwise have given to the apostle's ministry, in propagating the christian dispensation.

But, say the same men, when the support and protection of the true christian religion is required against heretics, schismatics, or infidels, the christian magistrate would not do his duty, if he did not interpose his authority to punish, or at least discountenance those who hold and preach false doctrines.

All this might be admitted, if the
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christian magistrate, in virtue of his office, could discern more than another man, what doctrines are true, and what are false, and more particularly when both parties appeal to the same standard, the holy scriptures.

The civil magistrate may indeed know as much of the matter as any other fallible man; and if he chuses to interpose in such cases, it may be just as well for himself, and generally speaking much better for the people, that he should do it according to his own plain, natural sentiments, than that he should be guided by the artificial refinements of others who may claim a right of devising a religious system for him.

But the truth is, neither the one nor the other are authorised to frame a proper directory for the man who is disposed seriously and diligently to examine and judge

judge for himself; as in the event, he is not to stand or fall by man's judgment, but by his own sincerity and integrity in the sight of God. If such a one after his utmost endeavours does not find out the *real* truth, he finds out what will answer the end of truth to himself. He finds out what appears to him to be the will of God, and the mind of Christ, and by steadily pursuing this in his practice, he is upon a level, as to the authority of his creed, with the most respectable of his superiors in station, who indeed have just the same right that he has of judging for themselves and of abounding in their own sense, but neither more nor less than he hath to prescribe his own sense of disputable points, as a rule and standard for all his fellow christians:

When facts and events speak so plainly and audibly in justification of these positions, it is to little purpose to appeal
to

to laboured deductions from principles *a priori*, i. e. to considerations of *necessity*, *order*, *expedience*, and the like. Take any particular system now extant, wrought up with the greatest appearance of wisdom and learning, and established upon the most equitable conditions, and if you confine your instructions to that only, the progress of the learner in the knowledge of christianity, will be very small. The reason is, the doctrine is above his capacity; he will not understand it. Send him to the scriptures for a confirmation of your system, and it is highly probable he will see things in a very different light. He may indeed learn in those sacred oracles what christianity is, but he may possibly learn at the same time, that your artificial theory is not christianity.

Establishments of religion, for public worship, and other good purposes of mutual edification, are doubtless highly ex-

expedient, and in the present state of things, even necessary. But when the edification of a christian people is the object of them, great care should be taken that they go not beyond the bounds prescribed by the nature of the dispensation on which they profess to be founded, which in this case, the scriptures exhibit with sufficient perspicuity and precision. Whenever men have acted in such cases without their proper warrant, error, mischief, and tyranny have been the certain consequences, of which popery stands as a deplorable instance, and an awful warning to all future times. So far as establishments of religion are either necessary or expedient, they are necessary and expedient for every serious and sincere christian. Can then those establishments be good, can they be righteous, can they be christian establishments, which exclude from christian privileges numbers of pious and serious christians, by prescribing conditions of communion, which neither

Christ

Christ nor his apostles have authorised, or so much as mentioned.

Submission to governors is a necessary and a christian duty, and while we are exposed in this transitory scene of things, to the fraud, injustice, and oppression of unreasonable and wicked men, the protection we expect from them, demands our compliance with their ordinances, even in things which might otherwise seem to bear hard upon the ease and interest of some individuals. Perhaps this obligation may to a certain degree be understood to extend to religious ordinances under the sanction of public authority. It may be expedient, for example, that the teachers of religion should comply with some things which *edify not*, that they may be useful in matters of more importance. But such compliance in christian states, should have its limits. The plain word of God, where christia-
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nity is publicly professed, is always to take place of the ordinances of man; and where there is an indisputable contrariety, to comply with the latter, cannot be innocent. And even in doubtful cases, where offences or scruples may arise in the minds of conscientious men, neither blameable in their moral character, nor obnoxious to civil government in other respects, to be rigorous and severe in exacting conformity, is more than the authority of the christian magistrate can justify. And in such cases, to desire and to solicit a revision of established forms and institutions, cannot be reasonably interpreted into an offence, or even an affront to the civil powers. There certainly can be no crime in desiring a reformation of such particulars in the public system of religion, as cannot be supported by the sure testimony of the word of God. A christian minister may think

think it his duty to remonstrate upon such subjects with freedom and courage; and who will say, it is not his duty? And where it is a duty, I am sure it cannot be a crime to point out blemishes and defects that have a manifest tendency to obstruct the edification of a christian people, which ought to be the principal thing considered in framing every religious establishment, of which christianity is the basis.

A late ingenious writer, sensible, no doubt, whither this reflection would carry those teachers, who are disposed, seriously and impartially, to compare religious ordinances, under the authority of a civil establishment, with the terms of christian communion exhibited in the scriptures, has observed, that "it was not necessary that christianity should always continue in the same circumstances

"stances, in which our Saviour himself
 "and his apostles left it."*

was not necessary that christianity should
 remain in the same circumstances of per-
 secution, in which our Saviour left it.

* Essay on Establishments, &c. What a pity the
 papists were not apprised of this *no necessity* at the time
 of reformation? "Luther and Calvin insisted," says
 Mr. Bayle, "that the christianity of the sixteenth cen-
 tury, was not at all like the christianity of the three
 first centuries. The Romish clergy maintained the
 contrary." *Nouvelles Lettres d'Auteur de la critique
 general sur la Hist. de Calvinisme*, p. 430. And conse-
 quently, that reformation was not necessary. Luther
 and Calvin, upon the supposition that christianity had
 undergone a deplorable change for the worse, were for
 bringing it back to its primitive *circumstances*. The
 papists asserted the circumstances of christianity had un-
 dergone no change; Mr. Bayle shews how easily they
 were confuted by matters of fact; and Luther and
 Calvin, in this part of the dispute, conquered and tri-
 umphed accordingly. Had the papists luckily thought
 of this *no necessity*, they might easily have defended the
 most absurd of their doctrines, and the most idolatrous
 parts of their worship, on the pretence, that they were
 necessarily subservient to the greatness and power of
 government; and that should christianity disown them,
 christianity must be injurious to society.

If this writer had only meant, that it was not necessary that christianity should remain in the same circumstances of persecution, in which our Saviour left it, and which the apostles and their successors experienced at different periods, for the first three hundred years after the appearance of Christ, the proposition might be admitted, as a state of peace and security, did not imply any necessity of deviating from the purity and simplicity of its rites and doctrines, as prescribed in the christian scriptures.

But when the same writer proceeds to say, that "society would be essentially injured, if christianity did not become subservient to the greatness and power of political government, TO AS GREAT A DEGREE as the FALSE RELIGIONS BEFORE IT had contributed to them," we can consider him

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no otherwise, than as an apologist for all those corruptions in doctrine and worship, which have been introduced into the christian church for political purposes, from the time it was first taken into the protection of the civil magistrate.

A reader of the scriptures, even with an ordinary portion of common sense, will see at once, that the disinterested purity and simplicity of the gospel of Christ, will not admit of its being made the tool of political greatness and power in the smallest degree; as nothing is more evident, than that such greatness and power are generally promoted by principles and dispositions, the most repugnant to those which are enjoined by the precepts and doctrines of Christ and his apostles.

Nor is christianity at all injurious to

society on this account. When christianity speaks of civil society, and of the ends which its rulers should aim at in their respective provinces, the political greatness and power of government are not its concern. It proposes a much better and nobler end, namely, *that men may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty*: an end sufficient for the earthly happiness of every christian society; an end which is seldom if ever accomplished, where greatness and power are the principal objects of government; which (if we may be permitted to judge from experience and examples) are commonly pursued by such arts and violations of the equitable rights of society, as are at utter enmity with godliness, honesty, quietness, and peace.

Another ingenious person, a fellow labourer in the same popular cause, finding, it is likely, some circumstances in modern

modern ecclesiastical governments, not quite so conformable to the scriptures, as for the honour and credit of the protestant religion, and for the sake of consistency of profession, one would wish they might be, apologises for this state of things by a suggestion, which turns not so immediately upon the supposition of a change of circumstances in christianity, as upon that of a want of precision in the sacred writings.

This writer having observed, that
 “there are doubts and questions concerning church-authority, which the
 “bare words of scripture will never enable us to resolve,” proceeds to say,
 “It is in this instance as in many others.
 “Men consult scripture for what is not
 “to be found in it; an accurate description of their rights and duties: whereas
 “the knowledge of these,” (and among the rest, the knowledge of the rights and
 F 3 duties

duties comprehended in the nature and foundation of church-authority) "is *supposed*, not *taught*, by the sacred writers."*

In

* Dr. Balguy's sermon at the consecration of the Bishop of Landaff, p. 4.—This expedient of fathering things upon the scripture by way of *supposition*, is of no little use to certain writers, who do not chuse to unmask all at once. We have been told, that the *immortality of the soul*, in a state of separation from the body, nay that even the *unity and existence* of the deity are taken for granted in the scriptures, taken for granted as truths demonstrable by natural light. Shall we conclude, as Dr. Balguy does with respect to church authority, that men consult the scriptures on the subject of the *unity and existence* of the deity, for what is not to be found in them? If not, to what purpose the observation? An honest plain searcher of the scriptures may perhaps be startled at the assertion, and not a little surprised at the assurance of the man who ventures to publish it, not being apprised of the turn that is to be served by an insinuation of that sort. If you can be persuaded that the *unity and existence* of

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In another passage, however, of the same discourse, we are informed, that
 “the founders of our holy religion esta-
 F 4 blished

the deity, are rather *supposed* and *taken for granted*, than expressly taught in the scriptures, your faith will not be put to the stretch by believing that the same may be the case with the *immortality* of the *separate* soul, or with Dr. Balguy's system of church authority. It is indeed true enough, that neither of these are to be found in the scriptures, not because the scripture *supposes* them or *takes them for granted*; but because they are the mere figments of human conceit, manifestly subversive, in the one case, of the christian doctrine of redemption, and in the other, of all christian liberty. That writers and preachers, who want to continue an undue influence over the consciences of their fellow christians, should take these freedoms with the scriptures, is not marvelous. But I must confess it gave me some concern to find an ingenious and able adversary to the doctrine of this sermon, arguing, upon another occasion, from *Matth. xviii. 15—17*; that “our Lord
 “took it for granted, that his disciples would form
 “themselves into such societies, and that those powers
 “of

"blissed a form of church government;" but lest we should conclude too hastily, that the nature and foundation of church authority might be learned from that establishment, the preacher immediately adds, "But their directions to us are

"for

"of admonition, censure, and excommunication would
 "be assumed and exercised. We may therefore con-
 "clude," (says this worthy person a little incautiously)
 "with certainty, that the great lawgiver and judge of
 "christians really meant that such churches, with such
 "provisions and powers, should be erected; and we
 "ought to consider this as a sufficient authority, and
 "even as equivalent to an express injunction to form
 "them." Dr. Priestley's *Essay on Church Discipline*,
 p. 120, 121. I am afraid the worthy Doctor would
 find it difficult to shew, that, *this presumptive injunc-*
tion being presupposed, Dr. Balguy's or even Pope Cle-
 ment's societies are not as much intitled to this *assump-*
tion and exercise of the provisions and powers he men-
 tions, as such societies as he had in his eye. Having
 made so liberal a concession in general terms, he would,
 I am afraid, find it in vain to confine Dr. Balguy to
 the example of the first planters of christianity.

“for the most part very general. Even
 “their example must be cautiously imitated,
 “in different times and under different
 “circumstances. In this one point they
 “are clear and explicit, that *authority*
 “once established must be *obeyed*.” p. 18.

Without pointing out the incongruity
 of these two passages, one with the o-
 ther, and particularly the little occasion
 for general directions, where the accurate
 knowledge of particulars is *supposed*, I
 would only observe, that according to
 this doctrine, when we tell the papists,
 that we cannot find the plenitude of the
 Pope's ecclesiastical power in the scrip-
 tures, they may answer, that this power
 is rather *supposed*, than expressly taught
 in the scriptures: and what should we
 have to reply? For one sort, or one
 mode of ecclesiastical government may
 just as well be *supposed* in the scriptures
 as another; and “the founders of our
 “holy

"holy religion being *clear* and *explicit*,
 "that authority once established *must* be
 "*obeyed*," in what light must our first
 reformers appear, who opposed them-
 selves to an authority which had a pos-
 session of several centuries to plead a-
 gainst their claims and pretensions?*

And then again, why may not other
 things be *supposed*, without being taught

* It is but fair to apprise the reader that this argu-
 ment no longer affects Dr. Balguy's system of church
 authority delivered in this sermon. In his charge to
 the clergy of the archdeaconry of Winchester in the
 year 1772, he professes himself the defender, not only
 of popery, but of every establishment under heaven.
 How consistent this character of a catholic champion
 may be, with that of a defender of the protestant
 church of England as by law established, may perhaps
 appear from some considerations offered to the public
 in the fourth of these discourses. In the mean time,
 our reformers must lie under the reproach of having
disobeyed authority once established.

in the scripture, as well as the nature and foundation of church authority? Why not articles of faith, and objects of religious worship? And where shall we draw the line which distinguishes what is clearly and explicitly required, from what is only supposed and taken for granted?

What kind of representations of christianity are these? What could tempt men of sense and learning to defend establishments upon these licentious principles, at the expence of almost every evangelical duty, and every benevolent end, enjoined and proposed by our Lord and his apostles in this gracious and heavenly dispensation, for the instruction and reformation of a degenerate race of mortals, lying in darkness and the shadow of death, without hope, and even without God in the world?

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The only inference I would draw from these particulars is, the necessity we are under to consider for ourselves, *what is Christianity?* To be going back frequently to this question, when we meet with men or books, which either through a false zeal, or a worse motive, are attempting to lead us into plausible systems and theories, adapted, not to the discovery of the truth, or the conviction of falsehood, but merely contrived to support and continue things in their present state whatever it may be, and to discourage all examination into the grounds and principles on which they are established.

We boast in vain of our improvements, under the lights afforded us from the time of Luther's reformation to the present period, if we must still be confined to interpret scripture according to scholastic definitions, and traditional conjectures, adopted in times when no better

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information could be had, and afterwards supported for the purpose of advancing the power and authority of ambitious ecclesiastics, from whose tyranny our forefathers found it necessary to withdraw themselves on the peril of being deprived of the benefits of the gospel, and of every advantage which the study of the scriptures hath since derived upon the professors of the protestant religion.

What the church of Rome would substitute in the place of these sacred oracles, under the name of antiquity, is little better than a heap of fictions, improved from traditional memorials of men, who were far from deserving the credit they have met with.* Nor is it any wonder that

* See the Lord Clarendon's excellent tract, *Of the Reverence due to Antiquity*. Collection of Tracts fol. 218. And then compare the grounds on which he enforced uniformity while he was in power, with these
his

that so many of these primitive memorialists should be so little scrupulous either in misreporting matters of fact, adulterating the simplicity of gospel doctrines, or adopting superstitious rites of worship, after the apostles were dead, when we consider that they were only the successors of a set of men who had acted the same part in their life-time, as appears from several passages in the apostolic history and epistles. St Paul, in particular, reprehends a number of idle and superstitious notions and practices, and, as the learned Scaliger hath shewn, alludes to many more, attempted to

his convictions, which can hardly be considered as merely the effects of his meditations at *Montpelier*; and having compared his practice with these sentiments concerning the precedents on which it was founded, forbear if you can to exclaim, *How hardly shall an ecclesiastical politician enter into a kingdom which is not of this world!*

to be introduced into the churches he himself had planted, and as it were under his very eye.*

To these presumptuous corrupters he gives many severe reproofs, and to their attempts it is that he opposes that necessary caution, *Coloss. ii. 8. Beware lest any man spoil you [or make a prey of you] through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after CHRIST. A caution perhaps not more necessary for the times in which it was delivered, than for our own.*

And

* Non frustra Apostolus, 2 *Thess. ii. 7.* ait, ἡδὴ μυστηρίον ἀνομίας ἐνεργεῖται. Tunc enim exitiabiles ritus et errores incipiebant primulum, quorum partem verbis castigavit, quia nocebant exemplo trahenti perniciem veniens in ævum, partem quia tollere non poterat, in super habuit. SCALIGER in 1 *Cor. xv. 29.*

And this being the case while the apostles still survived, what can we think of the times and the men which succeeded them? Were these likely to furnish more authentic precedents against the sense of the apostle himself? Does he not point them out as grievous wolves that, after his departure, should enter in, not sparing the flock? Foretelling to the Ephesian elders, that even from among themselves, men should arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* That is

* Acts xx. 29, 30. and compare Apoc. ii. 1—6. Commentators generally apply this character of *men speaking perverse things*, &c. to the *heretics* of those times, and, by *accommodation*, to those moderns who differ from their particular system, and who become of course the progeny of those corrupters, of whom the apostle here meant to warn the Ephesian elders. Erasmus, however, gives the word *disparumera* the signification of *distorta* or *obliqua*. *Hoc est*, says he, *minime simplicia, minime sincera. Nam veritatis, ut*

is to say, to procure and establish a strong party of men of their own stamp, to abett their ambitious and worldly designs at all events. In which, as we learn from history, they succeeded but too well, not without deriving the impressions they made in those early ages, upon the present times; nor would it perhaps be too rash a conjecture, that many of those whom we are inclined to venerate as the primitive leaders of our ecclesiastical fashions, might be the very pragmatistical teachers whom the apostle meant here to mark as the men to be most avoided.

Finally, it is not only material for our own information to learn what true christianity

ait tragicus, simplex est oratio. According to which exposition, even some reputedly orthodox creedmakers may not be out of the reach of this prophecy.

Christianity is, or where it may be found, but material for the information of those who are committed to our care and oversight, as ministers of the gospel. The common people are subject to delusions in matters of religion of various kinds, but more particularly to those which arise from the prejudices they contract in favour of the system in which they have been educated, and by which their principles are instilled as it were mechanically, without sufficient pains taken with them by their instructors, to shew them how what they profess, is connected with or related to the true foundation of their christian faith and worship.

Our province requires us not only to lead our people into the way of truth, but, as much as possible, to inspire them with the love of it, to shew them the comfort and advantages of christian knowledge, to prevail with them to search and

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examine the scriptures for themselves, and to bring every thing that is taught them to that test; so that they may not only be ready to give a proper answer to those who ask a reason of the hope that is in them, but may likewise have a sufficient stock of this sacred treasure to apply on all occasions, for consolation in adversity, for support under every trial, and for stedfastness and resolution in the course of their christian practice, wherein they will meet with so many temptations, so many bad examples to turn them out of the way of truth, so much opposition, scorn, and contempt to discourage their perseverance, and so much plausible sophistry to allure them into the ambitious, avaricious, and sensual pursuits of worldly good; and all from those who profess the same religion with themselves; but would pretend to improve it by maxims of prudence and decency, which, in the event, make a

conformity to the world a more indispensable qualification of a christian, than that *renewal of the mind* which is opposed to it by the apostle Paul, as the means of proving or discerning more perfectly the will of God, in the dispensation of the gospel.

Nothing, in our present situation, can be more unworthy of our ministerial calling, than to take the advantage of any personal esteem we may have from our people, or of any wrong notions they may entertain of peculiar gifts and privileges belonging to the clerical character, to inculcate our own private opinions and sentiments on disputable points of doctrine, as matters of faith to be believed on the peril of their salvation. We may, and we ought freely to profess our sentiments, and, with a becoming modesty, give our reasons why we adopt them; but to say to the multitude, thus and thus

thus ye must believe, or be shut out of the kingdom of heaven, may amaze and terrify the ignorant and the fearful, and procure an outward assent to what is advanced with such assurance; and in certain circumstances, may serve perhaps to gain over numbers to strengthen a sect or a party, but will not add one grain of christian knowledge or christian edification to the reasonable mind of the humble hearer, who, whatever may be pretended, is as much intitled to the knowledge of the truth, as the ablest of his teachers.

True christianity speaks another language. *Search the scriptures, whether these things are so.—Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God. Beware of false prophets. Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right. I speak,* says the great apostle of the

the Gentiles, as to wise men, judge ye what I say.

Be these our rules in our teaching, and be these our instructions to our hearers. Let us be cloathed with the same moderation and with the same humility, and, as far as possible, prevail with our people to make themselves judges from their own diligent study of the scriptures, what true christianity is. And let us be assured that the more we succede in these exhortations and endeavours, the more sincere believers, and the more true servants of God we shall find among them; and what is still more, we shall find more agreement in opinions, more union of affections, and more edification every way, among ourselves, than ever yet was produced, or ever will be, either by the terrors or allurements invented by the wisdom of the world to inforce uniformity of faith and worship, or by the

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peremptory decisions and sentences of particular teachers, pretending with unabashed assurance, to supernatural illuminations. The glory cannot be great in either case, when the numbers that are added either to an established system, or to a sect or party deviating from it, are merely the profelytes of ignorance and credulity.

peremptory decisions and sentences of particular teachers, pretending with unpaired assurance, to supernatural illumination. The glory cannot be given in either case, when the numbers that are added either to an established system, or to a sect or party deviating from it, are merely the prescripts of ignorance and credulity.

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DISCOURSE III.

On the true meaning of the phrase, THE INTERESTS OF RELIGION.

IT is a complaint of long standing, and has been often occasionally repeated; that most of the controversies on theological subjects, which have disturbed the peace of christian churches of different denominations, have been owing to the abuse and misapplication of certain terms, invented by those who took upon them to fix the standard of orthodoxy for the religious societies in which they respectively presided.

They who were unwilling to be concluded by such arbitrary interpretations
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of scripture, esteeming them only as the unauthorised tenets of some particular doctor, who had credit and influence enough with his party to procure their reception and establishment; set themselves to examine, by such lights as those times in which they lived afforded, into the foundation on which these systems were built. The consequences were, opposition and controversy, which arising in times when good learning and rational criticism were at a low ebb, the contest generally speaking, became in the end a mere strife of words, concerning which both sides were often equally mistaken, and equally distant from the true sense of the sacred writings to which they respectively appealed.

The instances of this kind were so many from those times when they who are called the fathers of the church, met in synods and councils, and thence thro'
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the squabbling times of the schoolmen, down to the period when the protestant reformation gave rise to new questions, that the learned *Scaliger*, who was eminently qualified to pass a competent judgment on the case, was provoked to say, that "all the controversies in religion" were occasioned by an ignorance of "grammar,"* a reflection which, though it might not be universally true, was certainly true with very few exceptions.

When, upon occasion of settling the forms of faith and worship, the question was, what system should be established as the creed or confession of a public society, it was usually determined by a plurality of voices, not often indeed of a learned, pious, and dispassionate assembly,

* Non altunde diffidia in religione pendent, quam ab ignorantione grammaticæ. SCALIGERANA PRIMA. Voce, *Grammatica*.

bly, but more frequently by the prevailing clamour of a disorderly multitude, impressed with the notions of a favourite leader; at least if the ecclesiastical writers have made faithful reports of the times and the men of which they have given the history.*

Some of these determinations make a part even of some protestant establishments to this day, and as such are espoused and adhered to as the venerable doctrines of primitive antiquity; and when objections have been made to them, as being founded on mistaken senses of scripture, the defendants have always pleaded, that they who lived nearest the times of the sacred writers were most likely to know their meaning. And though this was manifestly begging the

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* See *Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii. 1754, from p. 54 to p. 82.

question, as the dispute was concerning words whose signification might be determined by the works of authors nearly contemporary with the writers of the New Testament,* yet this was and still is an entrenchment out of which even learned men have not ventured, from a general consciousness, and perhaps not without a particular experience, that the adversary could not safely be encountered upon more open ground.

If it should still be thought that this prejudice would be insufficient to keep matters in this train among an enlightened and improving people, as we pretend to be, there is I am afraid but one other

* The labours of Lightfoot, Gataker, Grotius, Heinsius, Capellus, Vitringa, Raphelius, Elfsner, Wetstein, and hardly fewer than a hundred more, have contributed to illustrate the christian scriptures to a degree of which our first reformers could have no conception.

other way of accounting for it, not peculiar to this or that religious society, but common to all of them which are established by sanctions of law. In every such society there will be a sort of politicians, who observing how greatly a persuasion of the perfection of the ruling system contributes to supply and secure the temporal emoluments annexed to the profession of it, will be apt to encourage an implicit attachment to the adopted forms, and to discountenance all freedom of inquiry, not only by flourishes of rhetoric, and specious argument, but too often by the interposition of supercilious authority.

On another hand, tendernefs for weak brethren, prepossessed by invincible prejudices of education, the disagreeable circumstances attending altercation with obstinate and perverse zealots, and the little
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that is to be got by contending, where the favour or the frowns of the great can so easily supersede the strongest arguments founded upon reason, and even the word of God; are considerations that may dispose many an honest and sensible man to keep his sentiments to himself, and to acquiesce under many inconveniences in his present situation, and wait with patience for that desirable season, when the mist of prejudice shall be dispelled, and way made for the free course of truth and righteousness by the removal of overbearing authority, and the corrupt influence of secular policy.

In the mean time, the liberal mind of man cannot always be controlled, or over-ruled, by any confederacies of the powers of this world. To such minds, I trust, I am now speaking; and, where the education and profession of a protestant

stant clergy, leads them to the examination of every thing that concerns the religion they are called to *teach*, as well as to *profess*, there could not be a greater indignity offered, either to their integrity or their understandings, than to suppose, that they take any system of doctrine and worship upon trust, and merely because it has the sanction of public authority; or that they should sacrifice their own sentiments to any considerations foreign to the character and office of a christian teacher.

Presuming upon this characteristic of my audience, I shall now take the liberty to lay before you one of those cases where the misapplication of a common expression, with a plausible sound, has passed with numbers of all parties in turn, for a criterion of the truth and excellence of their particular profession, upon the merit of being the alledged end of

of their respective leaders, in settling the terms of conformity to the particular forms of doctrine and discipline they have espoused.

The expression I mean, is, **THE INTERESTS OF RELIGION.** If a man can be persuaded, that to profess his faith in such or such a form, or to worship God with such or such circumstances, is for *The Interests of Religion*, preferably to other modes or circumstances, he will conclude of course, that all deviations from his prescribed creed or ritual, are against *The Interests of Religion*, and will be accordingly tenacious in professing them, and zealous in maintaining them, without the least idea in what *The true Interests of Religion* consist, or by what means they might be most effectually promoted.

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The grounds of this mistaken zeal are not difficult to be assigned.

The most zealous apologists for religious establishments, whether founded upon civil or ecclesiastical authority, have been obliged to acknowledge, that the very best and wisest of them have fallen far short of the effects proposed by them, and expected from them at their first institution. These effects, to take them at the lowest, are declared to be, that the people to be edified by them, being made wise unto salvation by proper instruction, should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

That all human establishments of religion in all countries, have come short of these gracious purposes, it would indeed be in vain to deny. The gross ignorance of the common people, the profligacy of public manners, the impiety of great num-

numbers, the injustice, contentiousness, falsehood, and dishonesty of still more, are matters of general notoriety in all countries; where, nevertheless, the very worst of men profess a zealous attachment to the religious system established by the ruling powers, and are very often the most bigotted in the defence of it.

If, in considering the rise and progress of these evils in the community, and how far they might be remedied by the influence of religion, you should suggest, that the plan might be altered, and expedients introduced which would tend more both to the edification of the people, and reformation of their manners; you would immediately be told, that “the fault is not in the forms and circumstances of the establishment, but in the people themselves, who neglect to apply to their religious occasions, the means provided by the establish-

"ment for their spiritual benefit;" and
 this being presupposed, "it follows," we
 are told, "that worse mischiefs are to
 "be apprehended from attempting to re-
 "form the establishment, and thereby
 "unsettling the minds of the sober and
 "pious conformists, who are edified by
 "it to the utmost of their wants and
 "wishes, than can arise from leaving
 "things in their present train, where the
 "civil powers may so easily interpose to
 "correct the scandals and offences occa-
 "sioned by the irreligious conformist;
 "and the conclusion is, that it is more
 "for *The Interests of Religion*, that the
 "established ordinances should remain as
 "they are."

Let us then examine, apart from the
 consideration of the force of this parti-
 cular argument, and without inquiring
 what may be objected to, or alledged in
 defence of particular establishments; in
 what

what *The Interests of Religion* truly consist, and what is the genuine signification of that expression.

The word, *Interest*, in the common acceptance of it, is a term relative to some kind of competition for benefits or advantages to be gained to some particular person, or some particular cause, superior to the benefits or advantages which would accrue from a different principle, or mode of action; and the idea it first suggests, is that of some *temporal* advantage.

It is, for example, for the *interest* of an individual, whose view is to make a fortune in the world, that he should be placed in a situation where his rivals have the least power, where there are the fewest obstructions to his projects, the greatest number of his friends and favourers, and the most commodious means

of exercising the particular art or science, or industry, on which his success depends.

If we carry this idea from an individual, to bodies and societies of men in combination, we find it is for the *interest* of their common cause, that its partizans be numerous and powerful, able to controul their rivals and opponents, and that the cause itself be such, as, in case of success, will derive upon its friends and abettors the several emoluments and advantages, which are proposed by those who enter into such engagements.

The word, *Religion*, on the other hand, when it is applied to that sort of it which we ourselves profess, ought never to mean any religion but the christian religion, as it is held forth in the scriptures. To apply the word *Religion* to the system of any particular church or sect, professing christianity exclusively, is
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to abuse the term, by appropriating it to that church or sect in a sense which implies, that other churches or sects have no religion. Whereas every sect or party has an equal right so to apply it, and the consequence would be, that what in one church or sect is for the interest or advancement of religion, would be absolutely the destruction of it in another.

The reason is plain. Churches, sects, and societies, formed upon plans of doctrine and worship peculiar to each respectively, have, in their several policies or institutions, certain *interests* so called, to cultivate, with which the christian religion, as such, hath nothing to do. The christian religion does not consider or provide for the *interests* of mankind as they are members of this or that sect or party, but as they are heirs, every one in his own right, and upon his own title, to the kingdom of heaven; nor

will a plurality of professors of one system of doctrine and worship, compared with another, and established with all the sanctions and formalities which human authority can give it, alter the case in the least degree. For it is possible, many a man may be a good christian upon the principles of the gospel of Christ, and yet fall far short of the conditions of membership prescribed by any one particular sect or church of nominal christians upon earth.

It is impossible to speak of *the interests of religion* among christians, with any sort of propriety, when the word *interest* is taken for any temporal advantage, (which, however, must always be the case when the *interest* of a particular church or sect is meant.) The spirit and genius of christianity hath no tendency, nor affords any means or motives to cultivate any such interests.

If

If you speak of the *interests of religion* in any other sense of the words, that is to say, for the *interest* every man has in his future inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, the words are once more perverted from the truth, and from their natural sense. For this manner of speaking supposes a *rivalship*, where the successful candidate excludes his competitor from all benefit or advantage of the prize in contest.

Undoubtedly it is for the glory of God, that the gospel should spread far and wide, from one end of the earth to the other. But this, we find, ends in the numbers of individuals in every country, sect, and party, who *fear God and work righteousness*, without any regard to the *peculiar* modes of worship, or systems of doctrine of human device, which the denominations of religionists to whom such individuals join themselves respectively,

tively, may prescribe or practise. All the *religious interest* that can here be considered, is the *personal interest* that every man has in the *fruits* of his religion, or in the recompense of his piety and righteousness ; which if you should call *the interests of religion*, or, as the state of the case requires, *the interests of the gospel*, you absurdly substitute the *means* for the *end*, and become absolutely unintelligible.

I am very sensible, that men began very early to talk of the honour and credit that accrued to the christian religion, on the rapid progress it made, and the numbers that were converted to it, and hence might easily enough adopt the notion, that this honour and credit terminated, some way or other, in the *interests* of the christian religion. It is possible too, that some countenance might be given to this notion, by some expressions

tions in the scriptures of the New Testament.

St. PAUL, for example, talks of *becoming the servant of all, that he might gain the more*, and mentions his conforming in several respects to the Jews *under the law*, and to the gentiles *without the law*, that he might *gain* some of both.*

The question is, to what these several converts were *gained*? As the apostle conformed himself to so many different sorts of professors, the inference has been, that he complied with the singularities of these various characters, in order to gain the greater numbers to, and consequently to promote the *interests* of the christian faith.

Here then arises another question. How
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* 1 Cor. ix. 19, 20, 21.

was, or how could the christian faith be *interested* in these *gains*? The christian faith was what it was, whether many or few were gained to it. Neither could it receive any intrinsic strength or advantage from the number of converts to it, nor be impaired or diminished, either as to its truth or its importance, though its professors had been ever so few. And therefore the apostle, meaning most probably to obviate this wrong apprehension, varies his expression in other passages, and at verse 22. says, *I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.**

Here, we see, these *gains* end in the *salvation* of the persons so *gained*; in the salvation of individuals, not as members of a sect, but as members of the undivided body of Christ. He speaks indeed
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* 1 Cor. ix. 22.

in the context of a *reward** accruing to himself from preaching the gospel, but this we find ends in his being partaker of the gospel, that is, of the benefits of the gospel with them that he had so gained.†

The idea of *interest*, as it stands, for any temporal advantage, is indeed utterly inconsistent with any description of religion we have in the scriptures. St. James says, *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*‡

What are the *gains* or the *interest* of this sort of *religion*? Nothing, but the final acceptance of the religionist with God hereafter. For these are all personal duties, from which, so far as the practitioner's

* 1 Cor. ix. 17, 18, † v. 23. ‡ James i. 27.

tiser's religion is concerned, no *interest* arises but to himself, and that an interest only in future.

The Greek word which is here translated *religion*, properly signifies *worship*, and sometimes indeed the public worship of a particular sect; as where the apostle *Paul* speaks of the Jew's religion, *Acts* xxvi. 5. But *St. James* takes his description of religion out of all relation to particular forms of public worship, and places it in a practice, to which persons of all sects and churches may conform, without any help from, or reference to the ritual institutions, by which his society is distinguished from the rest. And in this, *St. Paul* perfectly agrees with him, where he says, *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit,*

not

*not in the latter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.**

The considerations which are suggested by this view of our subject are too many and various, to be taken within the compass of a discourse adapted to such occasions as the present. I shall therefore only add a few remarks upon a single text of scripture, which sets forth the means as well as the end of professing the christian religion, and may perhaps assist us to conceive wherein the true interests of it consist, so far as that term may be applied to it with any propriety.

St. Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, chap. ii. 4. tells him, that *God willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*; where out of all doubt, the coming to the knowledge

* Rom. ii. 28, 29.

of the truth, is spoken of as the means of being saved, and consequently the primary object of the will of God.* By the truth is here meant, the doctrine of the gospel, or the word of God, and the consequence is, that the more of this knowledge any man acquires, the better he is qualified to work out his salvation.

It is the will of God then, that this truth should be known to all men, to men of every class, and in every station. And in order to its being known to the extent that the will of God intends it should be, the apostle in another epistle exhorts the Thessalonians to pray, for the preachers of the word of God, that it might have its free course, unmolested and

* *Et ut serventur, vult eos venire ad cognitionem veritatis.* Evangelicæ, Scilicet. *Grotius.* Who adds, *Hoc cum ita sit, debemus et dare operam, ut omnibus innotescat veritas, et ei labori, preces pro omnibus adjungere.*

and unrestrained by the opposition which unreasonable and wicked men were disposed to give to such preachers. And in the same place he mentions another advantage the word of God would gain by this *freedom*, the advantage of being *glorified*, as well as *known* by this extensive dispersion of it.

If then we should chuse to call this *glorification* of the word of God, arising from the extensive progress it makes among mankind, *The interest of religion*, though the term may be improperly applied, it may serve to instruct us what is our duty in promoting this *interest*. And this will be, not only to preach the word of God with freedom in our several limited departments, but to endeavour to the utmost to remove every obstruction to its *free course* elsewhere, which the selfish policy

lley of this world may have laid in its way, and to bring to light every thing relating to this superior *interest*, which the *temporal interests* of particular societies may dispose them to stifle and to suppress, or to disfigure and misrepresent; remembering, that God would have *all men* to come to the knowledge of the *truth*, as the means of their *salvation*, and that he hath made no reserve or exception of any sort of men, on account of their unfitness for this knowledge, that will authorise us to keep back any part of it from the meanest christian that lives.

How inconsistent then must it be with the will of God in giving us this gracious dispensation, to block up the free course of his word and his truth, by confining religious doctrines to the terms of an artificial composition, and under the pretence of substituting authentic interpretations of scripture, as standards of ortho-

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dox faith for persons of all degrees and capacities, to impose upon christians the notions of men of mere scholastic erudition, expressed in that abstruse, intricate, and technical language to which a large majority of mankind must ever be strangers; and what is even worse, to prevent by various discouragements, in times when all other sorts of knowledge are increased, that freedom of examination, which might deliver men from a bondage imposed upon them, when the task-masters wanted either the sense and the spirit to examine into the true meaning of the scriptures themselves, or the liberality of mind to permit such examination to others who were better disposed, as well as better qualified.

The first reformers were very sensible how necessary it was that the word of God should have its *free course*, in order to dispel the thick darkness of popery;

and they found the amazing effects of that expedient of promoting knowledge, in the number of those who were converted from that wretched compound of tyranny and superstition. The protestant religion in those days was called The Gospel, in contrast with the paganish fables, idolatries, and traditions, which made so considerable and essential a part of the popish system. And happy would it have been for the protestant cause, had the conductors of it never been known by any name but that of Evangelics or Gospellers, by which they were at first distinguished. This would at least have reminded them of the impropriety of being divided into sects, from which they adopted so many different denominations, few of whose peculiarities had any countenance in the sacred writings; whence it happened in the end, that what was asserted to *glorify* the word of God in one

for
the thick darkness of popery;
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society, was understood in another to
debase and corrupt it.

The truth is, the study of the scriptures
was, in those days, a new employment.*
Men wanted the proper helps and en-
couragements, in that sudden emerſion
from the darkness and ignorance of the
foregoing times, with which a farther
progreſs in good learning furnished their
ſucceſſors. Erasmus, Luther, Melanc-
thon, Calvin, Beza, Martyr, and Bucer
abroad,

* Laurentius Valla ſeems to have been the firſt who
had the courage to reſcue the ſacred ſcriptures from
the barbariſms of the monks and ſchoolmen. Erasmus
found his manuſcript, *De collatione Novi Teſtamenti*,
in an old library, in the year 1504, and publiſhed it
in 1505. This *collation* relates chiefly to the rectifying
the vulgate Latin, by comparing it with the original
Greek. Erasmus makes great uſe of this work in his
Annotations, and though he frequently finds fault with
Valla's interpretations, he does full juſtice to his merit,
particularly in his note upon *Acts* xiii. 9. where he
highly commends the diligence of Valla in investiga-

abroad, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and Hooper, in our country, and many more both at home and abroad, were eminent and valuable men, and pious servants of God, and ever to be honoured for their great services in opening the way for the free course of the word of God, which they found miserably oppressed and obstructed by human traditions. It is nevertheless certain, that there have been in all times men, far below some of them in what are called natural talents, who have made it appear, that

“ting what was agreeing, or discordant, or corrupted
 “in the sacred writings, seeing that at the very time
 “*Erasmus* was writing, there were so many thousands
 “of divines, who were so far from using this method
 “of comparison and disquisition, that they did not so
 “much as know in what language the apostles wrote.”
Luther had never seen a Bible till the year 1506, when he accidentally met with a Latin one in the Convent of the Augustines at *Erford*, and found that there were many texts both in the Gospels and Epistles, which were never read to the people. *Luther* was then in his twenty-third year.

that their interpretations, in many instances, went upon mistaken grounds: and that the genuine sense of the sacred writers does by no means countenance some of the particular hypotheses which they then espoused.

And yet so it hath happened, that several of these interpretations, expressed in terms borrowed from the logic and philosophy of those times, and drawn up into artificial formularies, not however without considerable variations of one from another, remain to this hour to be the standards of faith and doctrine in particular churches, founded either by these first reformers themselves, or by those who most tenaciously adhered to them in the earlier days of reformation. And when the civil powers presiding in those states and countries where these systems were received respectively, had added the sanction of their authority to them, it became penal

in some degree, more or less, to dissent from them; when it was to little purpose for the dissenter to claim the privilege of being concluded by the scripture alone, although all protestant churches had laid that as the foundation of their separating from the church of Rome.

The unchristian persecutions among the protestants themselves, occasioned by these exclusive terms of communion, it is irksome to recollect. The pretence however always was, that the *interests of religion* required this severity to dissenters, which too often only meant the *temporal interests* of that particular church or established society which exercised it, and too often implied an ambition to gain the precedence, and consequently some degree of dominion over the rest.

The obstruction which this discipline would give to the free course of the word
of

of God, or the knowledge of the truth is easy to be conceived. Besides the discouragement arising from it to those who would otherwise be inclined to examine whether these things were so, the far greater part, from various motives of fear, indolence, or secular avocations, would set up their rest at once in the prescribed formula of doctrine and worship, and never think of going to the scriptures as a test of the truth or importance of what their rulers had authorised and established, and what their parents and teachers had been inculcating into them, from their infancy.

But as I have already said, the active mind of man will, as particular occasions and suggestions arise, break through all unnatural restraints, and, where religion is the object of inquiry, will ever be setting the word of God against the authority of man; nor ought we to be either

surprised or alarmed that so many controversies have arisen from this freedom of examination. We should rather be thankful for that moderation which, in the present age, hath given way to it. However unedifying religious controversy may be in particular instances, where the invidious and uncharitable reproaches, which the party zeal of contending writers on the one side and the other, mutually create scandal and offence, religious truth is always a gainer in the end; and, though it may seem a paradox to some people who have entertained a different idea, *the true interest of true religion*, or, in other words, *the knowledge of the truth*, hath been an hundred fold more promoted by these liberal disquisitions, than by all the terrors on the one side, and all the discouragements on the other, which, by the intervention of temporal rewards and penalties, have disposed so large a majority of nominal christians to acquiesce in forms

forms and systems, that persons of very moderate abilities might have discovered (had they turned their attention and endeavours that way) to be very inferior instruments of christian edification, and perhaps, in some instances, not at all related to it.

The prophet Daniel, speaking of evangelical times, says, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*, a passage which may be understood of the reviviscence of scriptural learning in the fifteenth century, and the progress of it in succeeding times, as well as of any other period. It is still, we may be assured, and will be in a progressive state of increasing till the consummation of this present mundane system.

It becomes us to be attentive to apply those portions of it, which are vouchsafed

safed in our times to their proper use. Among other discoveries of importance, the study of the scriptures hath afforded pretty strong proofs to more persons perhaps than will readily own it, that it is high time to review those forms of doctrine and worship, which our protestant ancestors have left us, to remove some of them, and correct others, as the nature of the case, and the principles of our christian and protestant religion clearly point out.

Many clergymen of the established church, and some in the most important offices of it, whose learning, piety, and solid judgment were never questioned, have freely acknowledged how sensibly and deeply they had felt the incumbrance that these mistaken expedients of human wisdom laid upon them, in the several branches of their ordinary ministrations. And, however we may find ourselves affected

fected in that respect, it behoves every
 serious and conscientious minister among
 us, not only to be earnest in his private
 supplications to the God of truth, but
 to be ready to join in all lawful and pru-
 dent endeavours, consistent with the re-
 spect we owe to those who have the rule
 over us, that a more liberal and christian
 policy may speedily take place in our
 particular department, that the word of
 God preached by us may have its *free*
course, and its full effect, which we can
 hardly hope for, wherever it is under the
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 of the world is too apt to lay upon it,
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DIS-

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 LIGION.



One effect of this disposition was the
restoration of protestants distinguishing from

DISCOURSE IV.

the discipline of the church of England as

On the original Principles of the first Pro-
testants.

discipline in long and bitter controversies,

WHEN, by the means of an happy
revolution in our government in
the year 1688, the free subjects of this
kingdom recovered the legal enjoyment
of their civil rights and privileges, which
had for some years backwards been un-
warrantably infringed by various exer-
tions of arbitrary power, it came to be
considered, among other provisions for
their future security, what was due to
the rights of conscience, and what the
protestant religion, the legal and esta-
blished religion of our country, prescri-
bed and required on that behalf.

marked by his encouragement and exam-

One effect of this disquisition was, the toleration of protestants dissenting from the ecclesiastical forms of worship and discipline of the church of England as by law established. The propriety of these forms and this discipline had been discussed in long and bitter controversies, between churchmen and dissenters, from the early days of Queen Elizabeth, down to the period just mentioned; and the enforcing conformity to them by penal and incapacitating laws, had created a variety of evils, which had more than once endangered the stability of civil government, without any abatement of that party zeal on either side, by which the contest was kept alive and fomented.

The healing spirit of King William considered these matters in their true light, and a set of moderate divines, animated by his encouragement and exam-

ple,

ple, examining these causes of offence and scandal, without those prepossessions which had incumbered their predecessors, candidly acknowledged, that however insignificant or unreasonable the objections of the nonconformists might be in some instances, there were others in which they were both reasonable and important. It was allowed, that some of the forms by law established, were unedifying at the best, that others were exceptionable on different accounts, and that the reformation of these was "desirable," as the good Bishop *Burnet* expressed it, "though there were not a dissenter in the nation."*

From that time the expedience of correcting and amending our established forms, not only of worship and discipline, but of doctrine also, has been the
 K subject

Conclusion of the History of his own Times.

subject of many tracts and discourses written by men of different denominations, who have, in their turn, been opposed and censured with warmth and acrimony by those, who, for particular reasons, have thought any alterations in our ecclesiastical system not only unnecessary, but dangerous to religion itself.

The progress of scriptural learning, and the free discussion of the nature and extent of christian liberty, seem at length to have given the solicitors for a revival and correction of our established forms, the advantage of the argument. The danger to religion, supposed to arise from such correction of forms of human composition, hath appeared to be founded on a prejudice, which would have operated equally against our reformation from popery, and even against the reception of the christian religion, considered in contrast with the state of the jewish religion, and

and of the superstitions and idolatries of the gentile world, at the time of our Saviour's appearance. And it is now well known, that great numbers are convinced, that a reformation of our established forms is in itself both reasonable and desirable, who, however, endeavour to persuade themselves and others, *that the times are not favourable to such an undertaking.**

K 2

There

* This may be explained to mean, either that the people in general are averse to such reformation, and that the consequences of attempting it would be schism in the church, or faction in the state, destructive of public peace; or that our governors in church and state are, *for some other reasons*, unwilling to undertake it. The variety of sects among us, and the numbers who are attached to them respectively, render this supposed *general aversion* to the alteration of our present system not a little disputable, especially as one principal object of such alteration should be, the reconciliation of all serious, candid, and reasonable protestants to the public forms of doctrine and worship, by making such

There are however, it seems, others who think that attempts which have so plain a tendency to give a greater degree of consistency to our protestant profession, and at the same time to promote the influence of the spirit and power of the christian religion, ought not to be accom-

abatements in the present exclusive terms of church membership, as might, in agreement with the fundamental principles of the protestant religion, admit all who *hold the head*, to a participation of the privileges and benefits, *now appropriated to conformity only*. As to reasons of any other sort, we are obliged to think honourably of our governors, and to conclude, that they would not decline so considerable a service to the truly religious and conscientious part of their subjects, for any reasons that are merely of the political sort. Much less, on that principle, that *The civil magistrate hath an absolute right to establish what religion he thinks proper*. The civil magistrate in this christian and protestant country, thank God, professeth no such maxim, however it may have been suggested to him by particular persons, who may hope to find their private account in having our ecclesiastical system continued in its present unedifying state.

commodated to times and seasons, which perhaps may never happen. And under this persuasion, a few of the clergy of the establishment, being joined by some lay-gentlemen of the liberal professions, sensible of the distresses of ingenuous minds occasioned by subscriptions to human forms of dubious authority, took the courage to make a trial towards obtaining some relief in that article of ministerial and academical discipline; and, for that purpose, about the beginning of the last year,* offered a petition to the House of Commons, which, after a solemn and important debate, was rejected by a considerable majority.

There were others of the clergy, who, though they wanted and wished for relief, and that in instances to which the prayer of the above-mentioned petition

K 3

did

did not extend, did not approve of the mode of application to which their brethren had recourse. They thought it more decent to make their suit to their ecclesiastical superiors in the first place. What were their sentiments of the merits of their cause, and what were the motives for chusing this method of advancing it, may be understood from the contents of a sensible and candid little tract, published by the reverend and worthy clergyman who is said to have first proposed this application to their Lordships the Bishops, in preference to that of the petitioners to parliament.*

The respectable persons who went upon this plan, were not, however, more fortunate than they who made the former

* Mr. Wollaston, to whom the public is said to be indebted for some seasonable and important *Queries relating to the Book of Common Prayer, &c.* addressed to those in authority.

mer attempt. It has never clearly appeared for what particular reasons they miscarried. It is said a general answer was given them, that their request could not either with safety or propriety be complied with.* And from whatever class of our superiors we receive such information, it becomes us to presume that their reasons for declining to lend their aid on such occasions, are of the most cogent and satisfactory kind.

When the determinations of our superiors in church and state, upon this or any other subject of public importance, come to be known, whether the grounds on which they proceed are understood or not, writers of all classes and degrees of

K 4

ability,

* See an excellent pamphlet, intituled, *The State of Subscription to the Articles and Liturgy of the Church of England, towards the close of the year 1773. Recommended to the most serious attention of the three Estates of the Realm*, p. 36, 37.

ability, rise up in defence of them. A man, who knows he has a numerous and powerful majority on his side, enters the lists with confidence and alacrity. Whatever his private views or motives may be, he supposes credit will be given him for the soundness of his principles, the strength of his arguments, the authenticity of his facts, and his candor in characterising his adversaries. He gives himself honour and consequence in setting up for the defender of statesmen and prelates, and imagines he runs no risque of being disowned, even though perhaps he is going upon grounds which they never thought of, and which they would, upon occasion, utterly disavow, as inconsistent with those principles of justice and decorum, which should influence them in their several relations to the public.

Of

Of this family of defenders have arisen of late one or two, who merit our especial notice, as, in their zeal to silence the importunity of those who call for reformation in the church, they have thought fit to adopt a system, which has but too much resemblance to that of the sceptical Mr. *Hobbes*, and in order to cut short the dispute with men who give them so much trouble while the contest is carried on upon protestant principles, make no scruple to place the protestant establishment of the church of England, upon the same foundation with the establishments of popery and paganism, consigning the government of christians and protestants in matters of religion, to the civil magistrate, with the same plenitude of power that a Julian, a Mahomet, or a Leo have arrogated to themselves in their respective administrations of ecclesiastical polity.

The

The tendency of this doctrine to overthrow every claim, and every advantage which the protestant churches of Europe, and the church of England among the rest, derive from their scriptural right of departing from the errors and usurpations of popery, will not permit us to pay these gentlemen the compliment they may expect, of being defenders of our church-establishment. They may be zealous and very sincere enemies to all who petition for, or otherwise wish to bring about a revival of our ecclesiastical forms and ordinances. They may be useful partizans in annoying those who pretend to disturb what they please to call *the peace of the church*. But let it not be imagined that they advance this desperate plea upon the authority, or with the countenance of our civil or ecclesiastical governors. There could not be a more injurious reflection cast upon them, than
to

to suppose they so little understand the principles of the constitution over which they preside; not to mention the very different sentiments which some illustrious names among them have repeatedly expressed.*

Con-

* Besides those great names among our prelates and dignified divines, who have formerly borne their testimony to the expedience of an ecclesiastical reformation of the established church, there are others still living who have not shunned to declare their judgment on this interesting subject. The learned Bishop Lowth's Visitation Sermon has been too often quoted, to permit the generous sentiments of so able and eminent a writer to remain in obscurity. And more lately some masterly and valuable *Considerations on the Propriety of requiring Subscription to Articles of Faith*, first printed at Cambridge, and since at London in this present year 1774, are known to come from the benevolent hand of a worthy prelate, whose labours have been for a long course of years peculiarly appropriated to the service of sound learning and true religion, and to the abatement of those unmanly and unchristian prejudices that have obstructed the progress of them in former times, the pernicious influence of which prevails but too much in the present.

Considering then this modern doctrine as the mere conceit of one or two particular writers, whose ends might not be so well answered by meeting their adversaries on the common principles of the Protestant Religion, and who may sooner find their account in amusing the lookers on with a little ingenious sophistry, than in convincing their understandings by solid reasoning, permit me to examine it on the same footing, and with the same freedom, as one would do any other doctrine tending to undermine the truth, the importance and authority of our holy religion, and, without defending, or even apologising for those persons who have solicited a reformation in ecclesiastical matters, on account of some supposed impropriety in the *manner* of their application, to endeavour to obviate the prejudice and scandal which a principle of this sort, if considered as a principle acknowledged by the church

church of England, must unavoidably fix upon it, with all serious and impartial judges of the subject to which it is applied.

The province of the civil magistrate, with respect to religious establishments founded on the principles of christianity, has been so accurately marked out by some of our most eminent authors, particularly by Mr. Locke and Bishop Hoadley, whose writings are in every one's hands, that it will be sufficient to refer to them for the theoretic part of the question. Our present inquiry shall be confined to the matter of fact, laying it down as a fundamental one, that the church of England claims to be a *protestant* church, whence it will follow of course, that the province of the civil magistrate in the government and protection of it, must be limited by such circumstances as are consistent with that claim.

The

The intervention of the states of the kingdom at the revolution to take the government out of the hands of King *James II.* who so notoriously transgressed those limits, is a demonstrative proof, that this is an authentic maxim of the British constitution. And that this was not an occasional doctrine taken up thro' the mere necessity of the times, appeared from what was advanced nine or ten years before, when the bill of exclusion was in debate, and when both the arguments for a total exclusion, and those which were only for limitations of the successor's power, tended to prove that, "up-
 "on the principles of the protestant con-
 "stitution, all power in ecclesiastical mat-
 "ters ought to be taken out of the hands,
 "even where the law had lodged it, when
 "there was manifest danger that such
 "power would be abused."*

And

* Burnet's Hist. O. T. folio, p. 455—460, vol. i.

And that this continues to be the constitutional doctrine of this kingdom at this time, appears from one of the latest occasions of asserting it, when one of the greatest ornaments of our municipal law that ever presided in that department, delivered the following *instructive lesson*, as he called it, to an august assembly, and on a very solemn occasion.

“It deserves the serious attention of
 “the whole nation,” says this great man,
 “of what important consequence it is to
 “preserve, not only the name and out-
 “ward form of the protestant religion
 “amongst us, but the *real uniform belief*
 “*and practice of it*. Indifference to all
 “religion prepares men for the external
 “profession of any, and what may not
 “that lead to? Give me leave to affirm
 “before this great assembly, that even,
 “abstracted from religious considerations,
 “the protestant religion ought to be had
 “in

“in the highest reverence, as the surest
 “barrier of our civil constitution. Eccle-
 “siastical usurpation seldom fails to end
 “in civil tyranny. The present happy
 “settlement of the crown is in truth,
 “and not in name only, the PROTE-
 “STANT SUCCESSION.”*

This illustrious testimony given to the importance of the protestant religion, being delivered before both Houses of Parliament, needed no farther sanction either to establish the matter of fact, or to justify the consequences drawn from it. This is the doctrine upon which our ecclesiastical, as well as our civil, constitution is built and supported. An establishment, subject to the mere will and pleasure of any human power, is not a *protestant* establishment. Ecclesiastical usurpation may be exercised by
 civil,

* Lord Hardwicke's speech, at the end of Lord
 Lovat's trial.

civil, as well as ecclesiastical superiors, and in either case will equally end in civil tyranny. According to this great authority, our supreme civil magistrate must be a PROTESTANT *in truth*, as well as *in name*. It is upon that consideration, that the important trust is committed to him. And his subjects, if they would reap the full benefit of this provision for their security and happiness, must be attentive to preserve, not only the *name* and *outward form* of the protestant religion, but the *real uniform belief and practice of it*. To rest in the mere name and outward form, is to betray an indifference to all religion, and that, we see, prepares men for the external profession of any, be it popery, mahometism, or paganism itself, in one word, of any religion or superstition which any civil magistrate may think fit to establish.

So

So different were the sentiments of this eminent man, and his noble audience, from the servile maxims of these modern retailers of ecclesiastical polity, who, after all, would perhaps be the first to exclaim against the practical consequences of their own doctrine, should the civil magistrate take them at their word. History hath recorded how profuse their predecessors were in professing their obedience and submission to *James II.* till the oppression was brought home to themselves; and then they were glad to avail themselves of those expedients of deliverance, which could only be procured for them upon principles that had been the object of their anathemas.

From this view of our constitutional privileges, we are naturally led to inquire in the next place, what is the true description of the protestant religion, and
how

how the religion professed and understood to be established in these kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, came by that name.

The general, and perhaps the most commonly received idea of the Protestant religion, is that of a religion which is opposite to popery, so far as relates to the renouncing of those erroneous doctrines and superstitious rites and ordinances, which specifically distinguish the church of Rome, from our own and other churches that separated from her in the sixteenth century, without considering the objections that arise from the examination of that *power*, by which such errors and superstitions were imposed upon a christian people.

It is true, these errors and superstitions could not be renounced, without renouncing in some degree, at the same time,

the authority that imposed them. But being considered, at the first, merely as doctrinal errors, and traditional excrescencies, which might be reformed without revolting from the papal government, the *extent* of the Pope's authority did not so early come in question. Luther himself, at the disputation he held with Eccius and others at Leipzig in the year 1519, allowed, that, supposing the church to be *civile corpus*, (which he does not appear to have controverted at that time) the Pope was oecumenical Pontiff.* What he questioned was, whether he was so *jure divino*? If not, the reformation of corruptions, errors, and abuses in the church might be reformed without the violation of the Pope's governmental authority. But if, on the other hand, the Pope's divine right to the headship of the church

* See Melancthon's Letter to Oecolampadius, concerning the conference at Leipzig, anno 1519, apud Dan. Gerdesium Hist. Evang. Renovat. p. 203.

church could be proved by the scriptures, his ordinances and institutions would then stand upon the footing of infallibility; and none of his doctrines or rites could be impeached of error or superstition, nor any disobedience to his decrees justified, in whatever respect they might appear to be contrary to the scripture.

Thus was the matter understood at that time; but in the progress of examination, the reformers grew wiser. They found that the church of Christ is a *spiritual body*, of which Christ alone is the head; and that the pretended authority of the Pope in matters of faith and conscience, was a mere usurpation. It is however to be observed, that the name of *Protestant* was not yet appropriated to the party which favoured *Luther's* reformation.

That denomination was given them

on the following occasion. In the year 1526, religious disputes running high in Germany, and the Emperor Charles V. being embroiled with the Pope, and at that time absent in Spain, his commissioners at the Diet then held at *Spire*, found it convenient to agree to an edict, importing, "that until either a General or
 " National Council might be assembled,
 " all parties should behave themselves in
 " their several stations and provinces,
 " that they might be able to give a good
 " account of themselves and their doings,
 " both to God and the Emperor."*

This edict was understood to leave all parties the free exercise of their religion by making them answerable only to God for their sincerity in professing it, and to the Emperor only for their behaviour, as obedient and peaceable subjects of the state.

But

* Sleidan, B. vi.

But in the year 1529, Ferdinand the Emperor's brother, in another diet assembled likewise at *Spire*, procured an edict wherein it was decreed, that "the doctrine of those who dissented from the church of Rome about the sacrament of the Lord's supper, should not be tolerated, neither the mass abolished; —that ministers should preach according to the sense and interpretation of scripture approved by the church, and that no Prince or State of the Empire should take into their protection the subjects of other jurisdictions, who should take refuge with them upon account of religion."

The favourers of reformation considering this edict as an infringement upon that of 1526, the Elector of Saxony, the Marquis of Brandenburg, the Dukes of Lunenbergh and Zell, the Landgrave of Hesse, the Count of Anhalt, and four-

teen of the free cities of Germany, *protested* against it, and from thence acquired the name of PROTESTANTS, which afterwards was applied to all who separated from the church of Rome.

The protestation of these Princes and States, besides some arguments drawn from the unseasonableness of the edict, with respect to the public peace, was in substance as follows.

“ The *Protesters* were ready, after the
 “ example of their ancestors, to contri-
 “ bute to the support and dignity of the
 “ Emperor to the utmost of their strength
 “ and substance ; but desired, that their
 “ present dissent might not be ill taken,
 “ as this was a matter which concerned
 “ the eternal salvation of all men. They
 “ could not recede from what they had
 “ already done in the work of reforma-
 “ tion,

“ tion, nor could bind themselves from
 “ going farther, without a reflection up-
 “ on the doctrine they had hitherto held
 “ sacred and true, and denying the pure
 “ and uncorrupted word of God, which
 “ they had espoused for their rule of faith
 “ and practice. They could not impli-
 “ citly submit to the traditions and in-
 “ terpretations of the church, unless it
 “ could be proved to be the *true* church.
 “ That since no doctrine could be more
 “ certain than that of God’s word, and
 “ that no doctrine should be taught be-
 “ sides it, the obscure places of scripture
 “ could not be better explained or illu-
 “ strated, than by such passages as were
 “ clear and plain. That therefore they
 “ were determined to pursue that me-
 “ thod, and to do their endeavour, that
 “ the Old and New Testaments should
 “ be taught in purity and with perspi-
 “ cuity. That this was the only plain
 “ and undeniable ground to be relied
 “ upon

“upon, the traditions of men having no
“solid foundation whatever.”*

To these principles the protestants adhered in all their conflicts with the Emperor in matters of religion, and when afterwards they broke into parties among themselves, these were the principles to which they mutually appealed. And as the edict here opposed wanted none of the formalities of a solemn ordinance of the state, this protestation plainly shews, what the sentiments of these Princes and free cities were, concerning the extent of the authority of the civil magistrate, professing the same christianity with themselves, in matters of religion.†

It

* *Sleidan*, B. vi.

† “It was an opinion,” says Bishop *Burnet*, “common enough at that time, that the Emperor was
“sovereign of Germany.—Whereas, by the constitu-
“tions

It would be no difficult matter to shew,
that what I have cited from that eminent
patriot so long and so worthily at the head
of

tions and laws of the empire, the Princes had reserved to themselves the right of coining, fortifying, arming, and entering into treaties, not only with one another, but with foreign Princes for their defence. A homage was indeed due to the Emperor, and a much greater submission was due to the Diet of the Empire; but the Princes were sovereigns in their own territories, and the Hans Towns were free States." *Hist. Reform.* vol. iii. p. 112. ed. 1715. But the Emperor's pretensions, as we are informed by *Bodin*, went far beyond this puny sovereignty over Germany. It was made a question among the Civilians, *An sunt hæretici qui negant Imperatorem Germanicum universi terrarum orbis esse dominum.* *De Rep.* l. 1. ch. ix. §. xii. Of this opinion, it seems, was the famous Lawyer *Bartolus*. This was securing the Emperor's authority in religious matters with a witness. I have not *Bodin's* book at hand, and take this particular from *Werdenhagen's* Synopsis, p. 327, which says nothing of the extent of the Emperor's dominion, but only laments the abuse of the word *heresy*, when applied to such subjects. *Bodin*, indeed, seems to question the sovereignty

of the law, exactly corresponds with the idea of the protestant religion exhibited in this remonstrance of these protestant Princes.

reignty of the Princes of Germany, and, according to his Epitomizer, says, "if these Princes had the rights of sovereignty [*majestatis*] absolutely, there could be no mistake about it; but as they accept of judges from the imperial Diet, and are obliged to submit to that jurisdiction, they must give up this pretension."

Id. ibid. ch. xxi. and in the preceding chapter he confines them to much fewer privileges than Bishop Burnet assigns them. However, that the Diet itself had no authority to controul the Princes or the free cities within their respective jurisdictions, appears from this very protestation. The edict pretended to prescribe whom they should or should not receive into their respective territories, and some other things which seemed to encroach on their peculiar prerogatives. To which they answer: *Quod autem præscribant, quid suis ipsi populis mandare, et quas in suis ditionibus ferre debeant leges, valde se mirari, præsertim cum ipsi minime sint passuri, si quis hoc invicem apud eos tentaret.* The remaining question then is, what power or authority these Princes and free cities had of establishing religion within their own territories respectively? Now the foundation on which they claimed this authority, independent

Princes. *Indifference, and external profession, are manifestly opposed to study and personal examination on the one hand, and*

on

dependent of the Emperor and the Diet, was, that religion is a matter *which concerns the eternal salvation of all men*, i. e. of every man, considered in his personal capacity. Accordingly, the subjects of these Princes respectively might, with equal reason, plead the same privilege against them, in case any of them should, upon examining the scriptures for themselves, find reason to dissent from the public establishment. The Princes, we see, in this protestation, pretend not to establish any thing, but that the scriptures should be taught in purity and with perspicuity. This they might probably think was afterwards sufficiently done in the Augustan Confession, and they might at that early period imagine, that their authority reached to the imposing this confession on their people, as the pure and perspicuous word of God, and the requiring also an assent to it of all who should become parties to their religious league. We shall see hereafter what our King *Henry VIII.* said to this. All this however was overthrown by Melancthon at the dispute held at *Leipsie* in 1541, when he so well distinguished between the political government of the magistrate, and the govern-

ment

on the other, to the *internal adherence* to the grand protestant rule of faith and practice, the holy scriptures. Which will farther appear by a short detail of what has happened in our own country, from

ment of the church where Christ is the head, and the scriptures the code of laws. He there shewed, that christians had a right of private judgment, which not only exempted them from the authoritative decisions of Popes and Councils, of Emperors and Diets, but from those of any other civil jurisdiction whatever. Porro, says he, *sæpe accidit in instauratione ecclesiæ, ut unus aut pauci privati renovarint doctrinam, et reprehenderint falsas persuasiones Pontificum et reliquæ multitudinis quæ dominabatur, ut Elias, Esaias, Jeremias, et Johannes Baptista, ab ordinaria potestate, et a multitudine differunt.* But these, it might be said, were extraordinary cases, and therefore he adds, *Et quidem mandatum Dei de confessione doctrinæ, cogit singulos recte sentientes, testari quod sentiunt, et, ubi vocatio requirit, contradicere multitudini et gubernatoribus errantibus.* See his Epistles, Lond. 1642, p. 79, 80. If it should be asked who are these *recte sentientes*, it is sufficient to answer, They who prefer and oppose the pure word of God, to the artificial compositions of men.

from the times when these foreign Princes were asserting their religious rights, against the ecclesiastical and civil powers then in being.

From the reign of King Henry the Eighth to the settlement under K. William, the extent of the civil magistrate's authority, in matters of religion, was never perhaps thoroughly canvassed upon the principles of the protestant reformation. Different systems were laid down by different writers, who, though they did not professedly write against each other, exhibited sentiments respectively, which could not by any means be reconciled to each other.

King Henry had the supremacy in ecclesiastical matters vested in him, by an act of the state; and though we may presume he would not have taken patiently a protestation from his own subjects,

jects, conceived in such terms as that of the protestant Princes of Germany, yet the matter of fact is, that he was contented to receive it with this limitation, *so far as is agreeable to the laws of Christ*: and with the same limitation it must be understood to belong to his successors. For as Bishop *Burnet* observes, "though these words of limitation had not been added, the nature of things required that they should have been supposed; since, among christians, all authority must be understood to be limited by the laws that Christ has given."* But what

* Hist. Reform. vol. iii. p. 53. The Bishop adds however, "It seems the King thought it was of great advantage to him to have this matter settled with any limitation; for *that* in time would be dropped and forgotten, as indeed it was," which is only to be understood of this particular reign. For our protestant Princes still kept up the distinction, by the words, *next under Christ*, as in the 36th of King *Edward's* Articles, and

what if this supremacy was or was not agreeable to the laws of Christ, though occasionally the subject of much altercation,
 M

and the explanation added in the revised articles of Queen Elizabeth. *K. Henry*, however, acknowledged the limitation in most express terms, when sixteen years afterwards, the protestant Princes of Germany demanding of him, as a condition of their alliance with him, "that the King would set forth the true doctrine of Christ, according to the Augsburgh confession," he answered, "that he intended to set forth the true doctrine of Christ, which he was ready to defend with life and goods. But that he being reckoned somewhat learned, and having many learned men in his kingdom, he did not think it meet to accept at any creature's hands the observing of his and his realm's faith, the only ground whereof remaineth in the scripture." *Ibid.* p. 115. The Elector of Saxony's opinion of *K. Henry* was, that he was an "impious man, with whom he desired to have no commerce. He was no better than the Pope, whose yoke he had thrown off only for his own ends; and that he intended out of the two religions to make a third, only for enriching himself, having condemned the principal points of their doctrine in parliament." *Burnet*, u. s. p. 166. *Seckendorf* gives the Elector's
 "opinion

tion, was never authoritatively determined, except by particular acts wherein it was exercised, without however drawing the line where that exercise should stop.

From

" opinion of K. Henry more at length. *Anglia regem, pro hoste evangelica doctrina habebat, qui nihil in reformatione praestitisset, quam ut se caput ecclesiae constitueret, ad quod a Deo non esset vocatus, interim in pios christianos tyrannicè saeviat, et flagitiosè vivat, in omnibus denique rebus tantum sua quærat commoda,—qua propter nihil boni se ab illo sperare posse dicebat.* Lib. iii. p. 552. col. 2. sub anno. 1545. One might perhaps say upon this occasion, *Illiacos intra muros peccatur et extra.* Perhaps the Elector did not so far forget his Duty as to turn persecutor, but doubtless he and his associates claimed some sort of *headship* in ecclesiastical affairs within their several jurisdictions, and particularly in establishing the Augsburgh confession, in which they forgot their protestant principle, as much as Henry forgot his answer to them, *that he would not receive his faith from any creature*, when he established the Six Articles. Bishop Burnet says of King Henry, " that " he seemed to think his subjects owed an entire refig- " nation of their reasons and consciences to him." u. 2.

p.

From the Reformation to the Revolution, there was no express law to exclude papists from succeeding to the crown of these realms. The law abolishing the papal power, did not imply such exclusion. For we see K. *Henry* continued attached to the superstitions of the popish church to the end of his life, persecuting those, by virtue of his headship, who refused to conform to his six articles, and

M. 2. those

p. 137. and again, p. 153, "The King acted as if he had a mind to be thought infallible." But the constitutional limits of this Headship are not to be taken from the caprice and inconsistency of this King's disposition. Nor is it to be imagined, that King Henry himself was always unmindful of the restriction under which it was conferred and accepted; for in this very page, where he is represented as setting up for infallibility, we are referred to a paper in the collection of Records, No. 70, where the King demands scripture proof of the Articles concerning *Extreme Unction, Confirmation, &c.*

those particularly who took any effectual steps towards a farther reformation.

It hath been said, crudely enough, that the supremacy conferred upon our sovereigns, is the same in all respects, as that of which the Pope was deprived at the time of K. Henry's separation from him. But this is by no means consistent with one of the reasons given for that deprivation, namely, that the Pope had no authority to decree or dispence with any thing contrary to the word of God. It is possible some of our protestant Princes, particularly Queen *Elizabeth*, may be thought not to have always paid sufficient regard to the above-mentioned limitations of her power in ecclesiastical matters. This, however, (being perhaps one of those tender points which the expediences of government required to be kept out of sight) never came to a legal discussion, till King James II.'s attempts
upon

upon the protestant religion rendered it a necessary object of the attention of the legislature.

The matter, indeed, had been debated in controversial writings, from very early times after the reformation, chiefly with the papists. The dissenters also, or as they were then called, the puritans, frequently brought the subject into view, in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth, King James I. and King Charles I. But their tenets in matters merely political, being likewise obnoxious to those Princes respectively, their remonstrances were overruled with an high hand, nor were their arguments ever sufficiently attended to, till the ruling powers were unhappily involved in the mischief occasioned by their too obstinate adherence to the contrary doctrine.

Upon the restoration of K. Charles II. while the government was apprehended to be in some danger from the remains of a party so lately subdued, accommodations were proposed, and concessions made, in words, at least, which bore some kind of resemblance to the protestant principle. But the government feeling by degrees its own strength, and they who had suffered by the ordinances of preceding times, being in haste to retaliate upon the fallen party, all considerations tending to moderate counsels, even those suggested by our common christianity, were superseded by the numbers and spirit of those whose chief object was the humiliation of dissenters from the establishment.

In the progress of that reign, however, the ill effects of this mistaken policy began to be felt, when it was too late to correct

correct it by the lenient and equitable expedients of a protestant government. The debates upon the bill of exclusion, and more particularly the arguments used for limiting the powers of the successor in prospect, in matters ecclesiastical, discovered the general sense of the protestant part of the nation on this article of the royal prerogative. Many reflections occur on these remarkable incidents in our history. Among others it may be observed, that they who opposed both these measures, as offering some sort of violence to our civil constitution, were not aware that the excess of their predilection for a compulsive uniformity in religion, had brought on a necessity for some restrictions of this kind upon a successor, who made no secret of his attachment to the political and ecclesiastical principles of the popish system. But when the wisdom of these cautionary proposals was completely justified by the

practices of K. James II. it was then seen and confessed on all hands, that what had been called *wholsome severities*, were equally iniquitous and detestable, whether inflicted by the governors of a popish or a protestant church,

It is by no means peculiar to our own times, that ambitious men are found to attach themselves to the dictates of the ruling powers, even in matters of religion, without sufficient regard to their prior obligations to the precepts of Christ. It is an infirmity common to some men in every class, and in every country, and has been the infirmity of churchmen as well as others, and was remarkably and unhappily so in the reign of K. Charles II.

From the time that the usurpations of the church of Rome were found to have no warrant or foundation in the word of God,

God, all serious and consistent protestants have held, that Christ being the Head of the Church, they to whom the government of it should be intrusted on earth, should act in subordination to the laws and rules he hath left for that purpose, consequently that the liberty of christians could not righteously be restrained to narrower bounds, than Christ their Head prescribed: a matter which was so clearly deduced from the accounts we have of his doctrine and practice in the scriptures of the New Testament, that there was no opposing it, but by denying that Christ is the Head of the Church.

Accordingly, the ecclesiastical proceedings under the government of K. Charles II. being upon this protestant maxim totally indefensible, certain ecclesiastics of those times scrupled not to ascribe to the civil magistrate an authority in matters of religion, independent of any subordination

dination to the laws of Christ ; and one of them in particular * “ was not ashamed to exalt the King’s authority in matters of religion in so indecent a manner,” (to use the expression of Bishop Burnet) “ that he condemned the ordinary form of saying the King was under God and Christ, as a crude and profane expression, saying, that though the King was under God, yet he was not under Christ, but above him.”†

The doctrine then in fashion, though carried to great lengths of extravagance, was indeed held and taught by others in more decent terms, but was however in general unsupportable by any position short of that of this rash Divine. They held equally with him, “ that it was necessary to the peace and government
“ of

* Dr. Samuel Parker.

† Burnet, Hist. O. T. fol. vol. i. p. 696.

“ of the world, that the supreme magi-
 “ strate of every commonwealth should
 “ be vested with a power to govern and
 “ conduct the consciences of his subjects
 “ in the affair of religion.” This, they
 appear to have thought, was consistent
 with the Headship of Christ over the
 church. But this bold man, who did
 not want abilities, saw the infirmity of
 the connection, and affirmed, “ that the
 “ doctrine which introduced the Head-
 “ ship of Christ over his church, by way
 “ of interfering with the magistrate in
 “ matters of religion and conscience, was
 “ a fanatical doctrine, and had almost
 “ persuaded the Princes of Europe, that
 “ christianity was an enemy to govern-
 “ ment.”*

And when these Princes should be so
 persuaded, there was surely nothing to
 hin-

* See Parker's Answer to the Rehearsal Transposed.

hinder them from establishing what religion they thought would be more commodious for their government than christianity. And if popery should appear to be such religion, in what were Queen Mary or King James II. to blame for in using their authority to establish popery? And how shall we excuse our predecessors of the last age from the guilt of rebellion, who, in consequence of their christian and protestant principles, took the government out of the hands of the latter, and settled, for all time to come, a succession of supreme magistrates upon the indispensable condition, that they should be *protestants in truth as well as in name*, and whose subjects should from thenceforward have a right to be governed in matters of religion, upon truly christian and protestant principles?

And now that our protestant church is founded upon this basis, and effectually

tually rescued, as we trust, from the perils to which these now exploded politics once exposed it, it must be no little surprize to the present generation, and particularly to a protestant clergy, to find that, according to the doctrine of one of their own order, our present church establishment cannot be defended, but upon principles which would equally justify the establishment of popery, paganism, or in one word, the establishment of every religion under heaven.

If you should inquire of what materials this general defence of all establishments consists, you will find it rests upon the doctrine above-mentioned, so much in vogue before the revolution, namely, upon the absolute power of the civil magistrate to govern and conduct the consciences of his subjects according to his discretion; and the steps by which we
are

are led to this conclusion, are such as these.

“ The use of reason in religion is to
 “ be denied to the bulk of mankind, be-
 “ cause they cannot use it.* It is scarce
 “ possible to name or invent an opinion
 “ more absurd in itself, or more hurtful
 “ to

* The Jesuit Wadingus was of the same opinion.
 “ *Illa fides merito suspecta esse debet, in qua regula cre-*
dendi plebeis est impossibilis. Meaning, by *illa fides*, the
 protestant faith, and by *regula credendi*, the holy scrip-
 tures. And his instance is, that no Plebeian, reading
 the words ascribed to Christ, *Whosoever sins ye remit,*
&c. in the vulgar tongue, can be certain, either that
 the words were spoken by our Saviour, or that they
 are to be understood of a power to forgive sins. What
Episcopus said to this, may be seen in his answer to
 Wadingus's epistle. But the Plebeian should have some
 certainty that his faith is such as ought not to be sus-
 pected; how shall he obtain it? “ By trusting in the
 church,” says the Jesuit. “ Excuse me,” says Dr. Bal-
 guy, “ the civil magistrate is the only proper judge in
 “ this case.” Which of them shall we believe? *Vid.*
Episcopii, op. vol. i. part ii. p. 97. *Amst.* 1650.

" to society, or more fatal to the cause
 " of piety and virtue, than many of
 " those which have been actually main-
 " tained by men, who called themselves
 " christians. — The reformed religion,
 " through the folly of some, and the
 " knavery of others, has too often proved
 " fatal to the power of the state.* — *There-*
 " *fore,*

* The argument stands thus: There are knaves and
 fools in some parts of the world. *Ergo*, the christian
 or the protestant religion ought not to be established,
 but where there are no knaves or fools. Well, what
 is to be substituted in their stead, where knavery and
 folly abound? The answer is, Whatever religion the
 civil magistrate thinks proper. But how if the civil
 magistrate himself should be either a knave or a fool?
 " A mere *Bagatelle*," must the Doctor answer, " the
 " state would still be safe while the magistrate had the
 " ordering of the forms of religion." Perhaps not.
 Many a tyrant has been demolished without any aid
 from religious knaves or fools. True it is indeed, that
 the protestant religion was fatal to the power of the
 state of our *James II.* But some people are simple
 enough to believe, that the *folly* and *knavery* was then
 all on the side of the magistrate. — Will the Doctor be
 pleased

“fore, as all forms of religion ought not
 “to be favoured equally by the civil
 “magistrate, the civil magistrate is the
 “only proper judge to what forms the
 “preference is due.* He is equally a
 “judge of the evidence by which the
 “opinions

pleased to name another instance? It is no argument
 of the *knavery* or *folly* of the reformed religion, that it
 has been unfavourable to civil tyranny.

* This puts one in mind of what the famous *Aeneas Sylvius* once said to one of his correspondents, when the dispute ran high, whether secular Princes might lawfully call general councils, or whether that power was in the Pope alone. *Non video clericos qui velint pro istâ vel illâ [sententiâ] martirium ferre. Omnes hanc fidem habemus quam nostri principes, qui si colerent idola, nos coleremus; et non solum Papam, sed Christum etiam negaremus, seculari potestate urgente.* I should certainly have recommended this as an authority in point to our ingenious opponent, had not Sylvius immediately added an unlucky reason for this clerical complaisance, viz. *Quia refriguit charitas, et omnis interlit fides.* *Æn. Sylv. Epist. 55. ad Gasp. Sohlick.*

"opinions of men are to be known.
 "Subscription to the scriptures is abso-
 "lutely nothing, or in other words, no
 "evidence of mens opinions."* And if
 N you

* By what sort of evidence the opinions of men are to be known, should, I apprehend, have been stated, before it had been determined who is the proper judge of it; the rather, as men may entertain opinions, of which no human means can come at the evidence, and consequently, of which no mortal man can judge; and something very like this is said in more than one passage of scripture. But let us procede as well as we can with the materials before us. "Subscription to the scriptures, is absolutely no evidence of men's opinions." We are now debating a point which presupposeth the establishment of the christian and protestant religion; and ask, why will not such subscription be evidence of the subscriber's opinions? The answer must be that stale one, that though such subscription may be evidence of the man's general belief of the scriptures, yet it is no evidence of his opinions concerning particular doctrines of those scriptures. To remedy this default, the magistrate draws out *his own* opinions upon paper, and requires the man, of whose opinions he wants competent evidence, to subscribe them;

you add to this what the same author says in another of his performances, namely, "that we should in vain look "into the scriptures for a proper model "of church government," you will have the exact features of that *ecclesiastical polity* above described, and calculated for the

them; and having obtained the subscription, he is supposed to be satisfied, that the subscriber's opinions and his own are exactly the same. But if we are to believe this advocate, his conclusion may be too hasty. There are such things, it seems, among even the reformed, as *folly* and *knavery*, and that in such abundance as to be too often fatal to the power of the state. A *fool* may misunderstand the magistrate's opinions, and a *knave* may pervert them and prevaricate. The magistrate therefore will want farther evidence, viz. that there is neither a *fool* nor a *knave* among his subscribers; and how he will come at this evidence, it is not possible to conceive, unless this advocate for his power can help him out. But this advocate is indeed but an inferior hand at finding out evidence of men's opinions: A Spanish Inquisitor would do it in half the time, and with half the trouble.

the reign of Charles II, and his immediate successor, and consequently to countenance and abet the persecution of all who dissent in the least degree from the magistrate's religion.

For be it observed, to the honour and credit of these elder brethren of our modern church politicians, that they argued consistently, and consequentially from their thesis, against any degree of toleration of any sect or religious society, which should dissent from the magistrate's establishment.

Whereas the advocate of the present times, who treads so carefully in their steps, in conferring the unlimited controul of religion upon the civil magistrate, pleads also, most absurdly and inconsistently, for an universal toleration, to the utter subversion of his whole fabric, and without having the least fore-

fight, as it should seem, that the same evils would arise to the state by tolerating, as by supporting the religious sects and societies which dissent, either from the forms of faith and doctrine, or the models of worship established by the civil magistrate.*

Toleration of dissenters from the public religious establishment, whose tenets are neither professedly, nor by implication, inimical to the civil government, is very plainly deduced from the principles of the christian religion, which takes the judgment of private conscience out of the hands of human power, and postpones it to the awful day when the secrets

* See *The Plea of the Petitioners stated and vindicated from the Misrepresentations in a late Charge delivered by Dr. Balguy to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Winchester*, printed for Payne, Hingeston, and Wilkie, 1773. p. 46. A most masterly performance, to which no answer has been or can be given.

secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. Upon these principles it is founded by the express declaration of our own protestant establishment; and consequently is totally inconsistent with the unlimited power of establishing what religion he thinks fit, vested in the civil magistrate by this modern politician. With this power in his hands, conferred with the circumstances, and for the purposes mentioned by this writer, he can in no degree permit the public profession of any religion different from that of his own establishment, without bringing upon himself, either the imputation of being unfaithful to his trust, or the suspicion of a consciousness, that his unlimited power of establishing his own religion is a mere pretence, and the exercise of it a mere usurpation. If the right of the dissenter to enjoy his own modes of faith and worship without molestation,

is derived from the sovereignty of Christ over those who profess his religion, the same rule by which he is understood to prescribe such toleration, must operate upon the christian magistrate in settling the terms of a righteous establishment.

I forbear to apply the foregoing considerations to the case of the Petitioners of last year. The defence of their proceedings seems to arise so immediately from the nature and genius of our happy constitution, that I have not yet seen any thing laid to their charge, which did not include either an open or tacit reflection upon the original and fundamental principles on which our reformation from popery, and the protestant settlement of our civil government in 1688, have been so ably defended by our most distinguished patriots, both in former and more modern times.

The

The petitioners are, in the mean time, very able to defend themselves, and have done it, I trust, to the satisfaction of every sensible man, who wishes to see an increase of christian piety and christian edification take place of those unprofitable disputes on points of systematical theology, from which no religious improvement is to be had for those, among whom it is for the peace and safety of every righteous government, that the influence of pure unadulterated christianity should chiefly flourish and abound.*

Let

* An unknown hand hath, with great impartiality, given the public a list of the pamphlets published on both sides of the controversy concerning subscriptions for several years by past, with their several dates, and also information where they may be had. It is indeed a controversy highly interesting to serious christians of all

Let me add to this, that where a society of worthy and well-meaning men, some of whom at least have been as eminently useful to the public in their stations, as most of their adversaries, are publicly misrepresented and even calumniated, I do not know why any honest man in any situation, public or private, should be afraid or ashamed of rescuing their characters from the false and malevolent imputations of a sort of opponents, who are far from satisfying the public

all ranks. By this enumeration it will be easily perceived that the Petitioners desire that the whole cause may be openly and candidly referred to the unbiassed examination of the public, and judgment given according to the merits. The title of this little piece is, *A short View of the Controversy occasioned by the Confessional, and the Petition to Parliament for Relief in the Matter of Subscription to the Liturgy, and XXXIX Articles of the Church of England.* London, printed for J. Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-yard, 1773.

public that they enter into the controversy with the *sole* desire of finding the truth.

I do not indeed see the propriety or the pertinence of bringing the Petitioners into a dispute, concerning the authority of the civil magistrate in matters of religion. If the Petitioners are wrong, it is not because they have declined to submit their cause to the civil powers; for to the civil powers their application for relief was made. And however exceptionable their cause may prove to be upon the merits of it, they might surely be opposed, so far as their request is improper and inadmissible, upon principles less destructive of our protestant establishment.

Let us not then give up the inestimable privileges we enjoy under it, for the sake of disappointing a body of men who

O

appear

appear to wish as well to it as ourselves.
 Let us not sacrifice our dearest interests,
 both as christian ministers and the sub-
 jects of a free protestant state, to an
 impotent resentment against a number
 of our brethren, who, if they have of-
 fended at all, have offended by endea-
 vouring to add, in their own apprehen-
 sion at least, a farther degree of strength,
 security, and union, to the common
 cause, in which all of us, as faithful
 ministers of the word of God, should be
 cordially and conscientiously engaged.

F I N I S.



Let us not...
 the privileges...
 of disposing a body of men who
 appear